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HINDUTVA AND DALITS

HINDUTVA AND DALITS: PERSPECTIVES FOR
UNDERSTANDING COMMUNAL PRAXIS
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To
all those unsung warriors
who struggle against caste and communalism
for a truly democratic India

Contents

Foreword
K. N. Panikkar ix

Preface xii

List of Contributors xiv

Introduction 1
Anand Teltumbde

PART I THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. Dalits in the Theory and Practice of Hindutva
Shamsul Islam 23

2. Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order
Anand Teltumbde 46

3. The Dalits and Hindutva: Gainers and Losers
Sandeep Pendse 75

4. Hindutva's Social Engineering: Participation of Dalits in the Anti-Muslim Pogrom, Gujarat 2002
Ram Puniyani 92

5. Between Her Legs: Hindutva and Dalit Women
Meena Kandasamy 108

6. Hindutva: Historicity of Dalit Connection
Prakash Louis 136

7. Dalits Face a Culture Threat Both from Within and Without
Gopal Guru 163

8. Dalit-Hindutva Alliance and the Dynamics of Dalit Politics
Ramesh Kamble 171

PART II HINDUTVA IN OPERATION

9. Subverting the Sudra–Ati-Sudra Revolution: The Uttar Pradesh Way
Subhash Gatade 187

10. Maharashtra: Dalit Politics in the Hindutva Trap
Suhas Palshikar 208

11. No Exit? Dalits, Hindutva and the Dravidian Movement
V. Geetha 224

12. Contesting Exclusions: Dalits and Reconstructions of Religious Identities in Punjab
Navprit Kaur 238

13. Hindutva and Dalits in Andhra Pradesh
K. S. Chalam 253

14. Hindutva's Influence on Dalits: The Case of Karnataka
Shivasundar 265

15. Gujarat: In Search of Answers
Anand Teltumbde and *Subhash Gatade* 275

16. The Sangh Parivar's Initiatives in the Tribal Belt of Wyanad in Kerala
T. K. Ramchandran and *P. T. John* 300

Index 304

Foreword

The place of Dalits and Adivasis in the changing political and social conditions of India has attracted much attention from both activists and academics. The Dalits represent the most underprivileged and oppressed sections of society, their deprivation being both social and economic. How they came to occupy such a low position in the social hierarchy is the result of the historical evolution of Indian society, and the inhuman conditions in which most of them continue to live even today is linked with the contemporary system of exploitation. The initiatives of the state after independence like reservation or free education have not made any substantial difference in their life, except that of a minuscule section who has been able to gain a certain upward mobility. While capitalist modernization has changed the lives of people around them, they continue to toil without even basic amenities and are subjected to inhuman brutality perpetrated by upper caste elites. The frustration arising out of such a situation has begun to be articulated, both socially and politically, in different parts of the country. But those who speak in their name do not always represent their interests. Therefore they often tend to fall a prey to the machinations of the very same forces, which have kept them suppressed for long, but who discern the necessity to solicit their support for gaining political power.

Such a situation has arisen with the rise of Hindutva. The relationship of Hindutva, which represents Hindu fundamentalist ideology, with Dalits and Adivasis is governed by two considerations. Firstly, the need to expand the electoral base of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); and secondly, to forge a broad consolidation of Hindus in order to achieve this political objective. With this in view the Sangh Parivar has been for a long time following a policy of Hinduizing the

Dalits and the Adivasis through the active intervention of a variety of organizations, particularly the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendras. Recently they have launched a programme of Ekal Vidyalayas manned by Rashtriya Swayamsevak cadres in about 150,000 tribal villages. The Hinduization appears to be attractive both to the Adivasis and the Dalits who have traditionally lived with a sense of deprivation in the margins of Hindu cultural life. They have now been invited to be part of a larger and 'superior' tradition, which many of them appear to welcome with a sense of pride. Therefore, they are open to be instrumental, as in the case of Gujarat, in the service of the ideology of Hindutva they have imbibed.

The essays collected in this volume throw light, both theoretically and empirically, on the process by which Hindutva has managed, at least partially, to incorporate Dalits into their fold. Given the inherent contradiction between the interests of Dalits and of the proponents of Hindutva it is evident that it is primarily an electoral strategy aiming to garner votes necessary for ensuring a majority in the Parliament. The Gujarat genocide also demonstrated that Dalits and Adivasis, when brought within the Hindutva fold, could serve as its foot soldiers whenever riots took place. The overtures of the Sangh Parivar towards Dalits are evidently a part of this political ploy. But why should Dalits who have a sharp contradiction with the Parivar's ideology and practice agree to perform a subordinate and instrumentalist role is more complex. The conservative and casteist character of the Parivar is quite evident, from its ideology and practice and from the social forces it represents. Yet a substantial section of Dalits are being drawn into the Hindutva fold. Such a transition is due to a variety of reasons integral to the conditions of their lives as well as the initiatives taken by the forces of Hindutva, which the essays in the volume seek to explain through an analysis of both the general and the specific.

The vulnerability of Dalits to the process of incorporation by Hindutva is because of a variety of reasons. Among these, the impact of globalization and the decline in the radical content of Dalit politics appear to be most crucial. Globalization has led to the displacement of a fairly large number of Dalits from their site of work and the ensuing frustration is exploited by Hindutva to provide them an identity which serves as a surrogate for voicing their discontent, however unreal it is. Given that the Dalit intelligentsia is continuously coopted into the

power structure, they are alienated from the interests and struggles of the Dalit masses. Ramesh Kamble has argued that this is not a sudden development, but the culmination of a process after Ambedkar. He has identified four phases of Dalit politics: politics of identity, politics of issues, politics of accommodation and politics of interests. The loss of balance between these four aspects after Ambedkar created the space for Hindutva overtures. According to Gopal Guru, as a result of this internal transformation and because of the economic pressures, Dalit politics has lost the moral stamina to withstand the powerful forces of Hindutva and globalization and therefore should ' think about revolutionary politics as an alternative'. This deserves elaboration and further discussion, both as a critique of the present politics and as a suggestion for remoulding the future politics.

The acceptance of Hinduization by a section of Dalits points to the urge for identification with a greater tradition and to be part of well organized social and religious structures. The Sangh Parivar has been effectively manipulating this cultural quest of Dalits and Adivasis by Sanskritizing their social customs and worship patterns. Subjected to the powerful hegemonizing forces of Hindutva, Dalits seem to overlook the fact that Hinduization would lead to cultural loss and its ultimate result would be cultural oppression, as the cultural practices of Dalits would be replaced by a system that is alien to their life.

The essays collected in this volume, written by activists and scholars, enquire into the ideological, social, cultural and political life of Dalits and explore the new ways in which they can envision their future. I hope that these essays would initiate serious debate about the issues they have brought to the fore.

Kalady, December 2004

K. N. PANIKKAR
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Preface

Despite the shockwaves it created in intellectual circles, the Dalit participation in the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 has remained largely unanalysed commensurate with its seriousness; There has not been much public discussion on it too. There was a plethora of reports and commentaries in general, in which this shocking phenomenon was noted but in passing terms. None made it a point of its focus and tried to reason out how the people who have been the victims of inhuman oppression of the systemic order created by a creed for several centuries could become foot soldiers of the forces that openly profess and uphold the essence of that creed. What made Dalits give up their egalitarian aspirations and fall prey to the vile allurements of hierarchical integration of Hindutva? The issue provoked many such questions. However, there was hardly any attempt to grapple with them. The only exception, in the grand intellectual tradition of this country that Dalit matter should be dealt with only by Dalits, was that of analytical comments by some Dalit intellectuals.

While Gujarat threw up the issue of Dalits being won over by the ultra right Hindutva forces, it was in no way confined to that state. The reports of these forces making inroads among Dalits have been coming in recent years from other states too.

The issue is too ominous to be left out because of cynicism. If Dalits are indeed won over by the Hindutva forces, the possibility of which does not appear very remote given the present state of the Dalit and other progressive movements, it would be simply cataclysmic for the future of this country. The potential of Dalits as a transformative agency is immense even though the mainstream intellectuals are reluctant to acknowledge it. They are the organic proletariat of this country, a potential volcanic force for any radical transformation. This force should not be allowed to get frittered away, much less be used by

the enemy camp.

It is with this motive that we decided to undertake a study that focuses on the phenomenon of Hindutva in relation to Dalits. The objective was to enrich our understanding of this phenomenon in terms of its essential characteristics by tracing out its historical development within a theoretical perspective. We would also consider the manner in which it is spreading its tentacles over various regions of the country in order to discern the underlying strategy and mode of practice of the Hindutva forces. The outcome was expected to give impetus to academic efforts in this direction and, more important, be useful to activists to formulate their strategic responses on the ground.

Many people contributed to this project in its various phases. The foremost being the authors who enthusiastically agreed to keep within the schedule. It was initially planned that we would carry out a peer review of the papers using the net. But the digital divide that existed appeared formidable and we had to think of a more practical alternative. At this time, our friend Ajit Muricken, Director of Vikas Adhyayan Kendra (VAK), Mumbai, offered to organize a seminar in Mumbai on the subject under the aegis of the Dalit Intellectual Collective. This seminar took place on 20-21 September 2003, in which all the papers were thoroughly discussed This event greatly facilitated the process of peer as well as expert review. I wish to register my sincere appreciation to VAK and particularly to Ajit Muricken for extending this help. I must record my gratitude to Professors Ram Bapat, Rajendra Vora, Peter D'Souza, Valerian Rodrigues, R. D. Maurya and Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer for their participation in the seminar as experts.

I am grateful to Professor K. N. Panikkar, Vice Chancellor, Sri Shankaracarya Sanskrit University, Kaladi, for readily agreeing to write the foreword. Some friends and colleagues variously helped me in my editorial tasks; notable among them are Olga Lobo, Arvind Krishnaswamy and Susan Abraham. I wish to record my sincere thanks to them. The contributors to this volume while sharing the ownership of this task have magnanimously borne with occasional harassment of project management and eventually complied with my demands. They too deserve my thanks. Lastly, I thank Samya, Kolkata, for enthusiastically undertaking the task of its publication.

Mumbai, 15 September 2004 A. T.

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Introduction

Anand Teltumbde

'Hindutva and Dalits' would have been an uncommon expression if the Dalits had not lent themselves to be abused by the Hindutva forces in the heinous genocide of Muslims in Gujarat and this abuse had not been so publicly noted. 'Hindutva' is defined as a political and social programme of the ultra right political forces in India based on a fascist ideology and majoritarian communal identity. The paradigmatic adjective 'fascist' that is so commonly associated with Hindutva and its protagonist Parivar these days, ordinarily not requiring any explanation, is however disputed by some people who are conditioned by a particular approach.[1] Without getting into definitional debate, it can be argued that Fascism as a multivariate phenomenon, a historic-political-logical concept,[2] needs to be seen in terms of its essential features and not merely in terms of the conditions that gave it birth at a historical moment. The book uses 'fascist' in this sense, following Stanley G. Payne's three-part model for a 'fascist minimum' (see Essay 2).[3] Although Hindutva draws heavily upon the historical tradition and practices of Hinduism in constructing a communal 'Hindu' identity, it does not have much to do with the religiosity of Hindu religion. Dalits are the victims of Hindu religion and Hindu soceity. They were historically excluded from the varna structure of the Hindu society as the untouchables, who came to emulate this structure with a loose identity of a *pancham* or fifth varna. During the last century, the glorious Dalit movements that sprouted during the colonial times variously sought to forge a separate identity for themselves from the one ordained by Hindu society.[4]

Historically speaking, Dalits and Hindutva or the Hindu nationalist

movement are closely related; the latter is known for its upper-caste and brahminical character and the former for its victimhood of Brahminism. Although the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the main torchbearer of Hindutva, is projected as an egalitarian vanguard of the 'Hindu rashtra', its leaders' conception of the ideal society continued to be based on the varna system.[5] They did not see anything wrong with the rigid hierarchical social order based on varna or its later derivative, caste. For instance, M. S. Golwalkar, the sarsangha-chalak who is known to eulogize the varna system as 'scientific',[6] wrote in 1938: 'It is none of the so-called drawbacks of the Hindu social order, which prevents us from regaining our ancient glory'[7] When Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS spoke about building 'Hindu character' by imparting *Samskaras* in Shakhas, he basically referred to brahminic values. The emphasis on *Samskaras*, which is still prevalent within the Sangh Parivar, denotes this upper caste bias.[8] The inveterate hatred the Hindutva camp displays for Muslims also could be traced to the brahminic prejudice against the low castes because the majority of Muslims are low caste converts. For instance, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Jan Sangh, argued against the Partition of Bengal in 1946: 'In order to placate a set of converts from low caste Hindus to Islam, very ancient Hindu culture will be sacrificed'.[9] Deendayal Upadhyaya, the RSS-trained chief ideologue of the Jan Sangh while propounding his Integral Humanism reiterated the justification of the Hindu social order based on castes as limbs of Virat–Purusha (the primeval man), which can produce 'identity of interest'.[10] This caste attitude informs the entire project of *Samarasata* for caste consolidation of the Hindutva camp. Hindutva means assimilative unity of all castes within an organicist perspective, never the annihilation of castes desired by Dalits.

It is to be said to the credit of Hindutva forces that they have managed to overshadow their historical character which is antagonistic to Dalits and even got the latter to carry out their communal agenda. Of course, the ideological degeneration of the Dalit movement has greatly helped them achieve this feat. The alliance between the Hindutva forces and Dalits that surfaced during the infamous genocide of Muslims that took place in Gujarat in 2002 needs to be understood in this context.

There appears to be two ways in which the unholy alliance between the Hindutva forces and Dalits was marked out for attention. One, it

stunned the entire secular camp which never expected the historical victims of brahminical forces to support the agenda of their oppressors against those of their own class. They were also aghast at the portents this vile development had for secularism in this country. Two, it provided a kind of corroboration of the middle class illusion of the caste Hindus that still rears a prejudice that only the low born Adivasis and Dalits could perpetrate such inhuman violence as raping teenage girls, cutting open wombs of pregnant women and throwing innocent kids into burning kilns. The caste Hindus would not care for the stark facts to the contrary that it is they who have been habitually perpetrating such crimes against Dalits year after year. [11] It is predominantly the caste Hindus who committed violence against the Muslims even in the present case.[12] They are content, gleefully voicing their pseudo-human concerns for the victims and further spewing the venom of caste prejudice. Notwithstanding these polar reactions, the notion of Dalits performing as the foot soldiers of the Hindutva brigade, whatever may be the scale, was indeed shocking. How could they forget the history of their persecution and help the very forces that persecuted them in accomplishing the latter's fascist agenda?

To a large extent, people seem reconciled with the Adivasi participation in the Gujarat riots, although not without shock and surprise. The Sangh Parivar had surreptitiously grabbed the virgin space on the margins of Hindudom and systematically worked on it over many decades, primarily through their Vanavasi Kalyan Ashrams. It has spanned off into a plethora of organizations and institutions that today run more than 4000 service projects in the tribal belts of the country. They have effectively Hinduized these people. Their tribal gods having been displaced by the Hindu ones like Ganeshas, their animistic traditions adulterated with Hindu caste culture, their tribal dialects replaced by Sanskritized lingo, their leaders displaced by the newly commissioned *karyakartas* or office bearers, and their minds poisoned with the venom of communalism, the innocent Adivasis have been transformed into a veritable army of Hindutva to fight its street battles.

But Dalits were not like the tribals. Even though they were outside the caste village and the Hindu varna structure, they had virtually come to be a part of it, albeit an enigmatic part. Dalits performed all kinds of menial jobs and provided sanitary services within a largely self-

sufficient village unit and received, as quasi alms, just enough from the village elites to subsist on. Unlike tribals who had their own world in forested lands, geographically distant from the mainland settlements of so-called 'civilized' people, Dalits were a part of the village system, living in relative proximity to these people, albeit in carefully segregated settlements. These two settlements, one for the touchables and the other for the untouchables, practically did not have any social transaction except for the primary one—providing vital labour and getting some morsels as alms for its reproduction. Even these restrictive transactions were regulated by an intricate code that claimed divine sanctity. This code practically reduced them to a stature far worse than that of animals. The social oppression and exploitation of Dalits was coterminous with their life and it flowed integrally with their living. Tribals did not have to suffer it.

Curiously, the segregated Dalit settlement came to replicate similar hierarchical caste structures like that of the touchables. They also came to mimic the customs and the traditions of the latter. It reached such an extent that even Untouchability came to be practised by certain castes vis-à-vis others within the Untouchable hamlet. They would not marry across castes, or dine with other castes, and would follow segregated living within their own cocoon. The intrusion of castes into the untouchable community fragmented them so hopelessly that despite living a common administrative identity imposed upon them, first during the colonial rule and subsequently by the Constitution of India, for nearly seven decades, they do not reflect any kind of unity, so much so that even an emancipatory identity like Dalit is rendered nearly meaningless. The mirroring of the hierarchical structure of the touchables, within the untouchable hamlets, was the shrewdest strategy or the worst accident that lent the entire caste system its self-sustaining character. Such was the corrosive power of caste that the consciousness of the victims was muted to get it masochistically to support their own oppression. Again, the tribals did not have to live such a vile paradox.

In the course of history, the demographic balance of castes was disturbed with the changes in occupational structure within the production system of villages; many castes losing their caste vocations and collecting under a caste of general workers, making it most populous among the untouchable castes. Devoid of any specific caste vocation, they could be analogized with the casual workmen of today

vis-à-vis others who had their respective caste vocations similar to permanent workers having specific assignments in the organized sector. These surplus people were the most miserable in the village setting, devoid of any stake or security in it, they were thus ready to grab any opportunity that came their way to escape it. When alien civilizations entered the country, through the invaders these people had the default advantage of being the first to interact with them. They were thus the first to awaken to their deceitful depravation within Hindu society and rebel against it. Their rebellion took several forms like joining invaders to defeat unjust native rulers, embracing the religion of the invaders and lending them a social base, and to articulate challenges to the Hindu social order. This process reached its zenith during the colonial times, which had created political spaces for various people to express their aspirations. Dr. Ambedkar is the greatest product of this process.

Tribal history has moved differently. Their interface with the Hindu social order largely begins through the colonial processes. Unlike Dalits, who immensely benefited from the by products of colonial infrastructure, in terms of access to education, non-discriminatory rule of law, spread of western liberal ethos, establishment of modern sectors of economy, consequent growth of cities that provided a little more room to manoeuvre against casteism, and so on, the tribals had their first brush with exploitation during the colonial times. They were uprooted from their settings by colonial law and were also exposed to the exploitation by the native *dikus* who rushed from the plains under the shelter of colonial rule. As a result, there has been a great difference between the consciousness of Dalits and that of tribals. While Dalits saw Brahminism to be their greatest enemy and reared anti-brahminic consciousness, tribals saw their enemy primarily in British colonizers and secondarily in the class of dikus, and therefore did not have any anti-Hindu or anti-brahminic consciousness. Rather, having realized that their backwardness was responsible for their suffering, they tended to welcome any helping hand with a developmental theme. It is here that the Sangh Parivar found virgin soil for its work and began working with a long-term perspective.

The case of Dalits was different. Dalits represented a rebellious consciousness against the caste system, albeit in varying intensity across various castes. Some hoped that reforms were possible within the Hindu order to rid it of certain caste-based discriminatory practices and reared

a milder form of anti-Hindu consciousness but some, particularly Ambedkarite Dalits, having come to the conclusion that the caste system being an inalienable part of the Hindu social order, its abolition was not possible without destruction of that order, reared an intensely anti-Hindu consciousness. The Hindutva forces therefore found it difficult to deal with Dalits with their revivalist proposition. They were ready to do away with certain superstructural practices like Untouchability but could not think of the abolition of caste which, indeed, characterized their creed. They detested the anti-Hindu demeanor of Ambedkarite Dalits, their celebrated renouncement of Hindu religion and embracing of Buddhism, their vehement critique of everything Hindu and, most of all, their getting preferential treatment in education, jobs, and so on, in the land they thought belonged only to Hindus. This animosity manifested itself in many anti-reservation riots which continued well until the late 1980s when they took the form of the anti-Mandal conflagration.

But soon the Hindutva forces realized their folly. While every riot was mainly directed towards the vociferous section of Dalits, that is, Ambedkarite Dalits, they could not be so confined on the ground. Every reservation riot tended to bring together all Dalits in opposition to the high caste Hindus. Mandal had complicated the situation further; it could potentially cut asunder Hindutva's social base. While, most Mandal riots paradoxically took place between the Dalits and OBCs (Other Backward Classes) who while at the lower end of the caste hierarchy are Savarnas unlike Dalits. Many of its constituent castes are materially no better than Dalits (but are above the so-called untouchables and have had their share of discrimination at the hands of the upper castes). They nevertheless brought the danger to the fore. The amorphous mass of the OBCs began showing fissures, and the possibility of the emergence of new caste coalitions could lead to nothing less than a civil war. At this juncture, taking advantage of the emergence of classes within Dalits with differential social aspirations vis-à-vis the Dalit masses and the fragmentation of their political formation through the electoral processes, the Hindutva forces had a strategic somersault and began befriending Dalits. This change could be seen in the form of Hindutva overtures in cooptation of Dalit icons like Dr. Ambedkar into its pantheon of the greats in the early 1980s and by coopting upwardly mobile Dalits to the Samajik Samrasata

Manch, a social platform that propagated social assimilation of various castes, not their *samata*, or equality.

Hindutva, true to its fascist character, never lets you know what it is up to. Diffusion is always a correlate of its strategy. While it adopted the above strategy of befriending Dalits in the early 1980s, its forces unleashed two full-blown anti-reservation riots: one in 1981 and another in 1985 in Gujarat alone. While it had already installed Ambedkar in its *prathasmaraniya* (the great preceptors who are remembered in the first prayer of the day) and mutated him as a Hindutva icon through reams of paper, it simultaneously tried denigrating him as a 'false god'. The practitioners of Hindutva always try to keep you on tenterhooks. On every issue, it appears to chart out a continuum of opinions through its myriad organizations, creating an apparition of internal democracy but in reality operating a well thought out strategic intention of containing all possible opinions within its umbrella. Whether it is the Mandir issue or the Mandal issue, whether it is an issue of communalism or globalization, one finds an array of opinions, deliberately contradictory, being issued from the Parivar. The only method that is left for analysts is to comprehend the core ideological drives of Hindutva and assess its manifest forms.

While the participation of Dalits in Gujarat as foot soldiers of Hindutva against the hapless Muslim population shocked and surprised many, particularly because these Dalits had themselves been thrashed by these forces in a not very distant past, none attempted to go beyond and see what it meant. While it was easy to reason out the above phenomenon in terms of the uniqueness of the Gujarati Dalits who persisted with the *Harijan* consciousness of the Gandhian movement and had not imbibed the rebellious Dalit consciousness of the Amebkarite movement, few realized that it was not the full explanation. Harijan consciousness signified their pitiful identity within Hindu society, which may not impel them to indulge in violent acts but could surely lead them to commit it in the service of the high caste elite, notwithstanding that it was not an adequate explanation for what happened in Gujarat. Now when the so-called Ambedkarite Dalits in Maharashtra are positively responding to the seemingly preposterous proposition of the Shiv Sena, the outfit that has been consistently opposed to Ambedkar and his people, for alliance with Ambedkarite Dalits, styled as unity of *Shivshakti* and *Bhimshakti,* one is compelled

to look beyond the simplistic and static formulations. None in Gujarat has justified the Dalit role; but in Ambedkarite Maharashtra many have rushed in to justify this unprincipled unity. None other than Raosaheb Kasbe, a senior intellectual famed for his vitriolic commentary on Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts* and pioneering attempts to bring Marx and Ambedkar closer, has supported this development.

Dalits are obviously taken in by the Hindutva rhetoric against Untouchability and caste. The communal offensive of Hindutva against the religious minorities does not seem to concern them. While they appear beholden to Christian philanthropy and therefore sympathetic to the Christians, the same is not true with the Muslims. Unlike the Christians, the majority of whom has come out calling itself as Dalit and thereby indentify with Dalits, Muslims do not distinguish Dalits from Hindus and hence in every Hindu-Muslim riot, Dalits become their easy target. Whether engineered or not, most Hindu-Muslim riots have a tendency to become riots predominantly between poor Muslims and poor Dalits. The consciousness of neither Muslims nor Dalits goes beyond the surface reality to enable them to see that it is the internecine battle between the class allies which they are made to fight by their common enemy. Today, Hindutva has declared the Muslims as their 'enemy Other' and extended a hand of friendship to Dalits as 'us allies'. But that is just a part of any fascist ploy; eventually fascists demand unconditional submission to their creed and hence your friendship or enmity will be determined by the nature of the ultimate contradiction you have with them. The ultimate contradiction between Hindutva forces and the Muslims is certainly not as antagonistic as those between Hindutva and Dalits; the former is extrinsic but the latter is intrinsic, inveterately defining the very existence of Hindudom.

The existential considerations are proffered by the proponents as an argument for the Hindutva-Dalit alliance. How long should the Dalits bear the brunt of enmity with the mighty forces of Hindutva? What has the four decade-long alliance with the Congress gotten the Dalits? What is the harm in trying out the Hindutva parties? Either way present politics is not based on ideology, why bring in ideological issues only in Dalit considerations? Such are the questions being posed by the proponents of the Hindutva-Dalit alliance to those opposed to it. Not dismissing them entirely, one can look at the aftermath of the repeated grand alliances that the Dalit formations tried out with the

Hindutva formation in Uttar Pradesh. If this strategy worked in serving the existential issues of Dalits, there may be a point in replicating it elsewhere. If its history had thrown up any option of resolving material contradiction without getting into confrontation, it would be certainly worth taking a look. Just because they would get bruised in the struggle against the mighty exploiter, if the oppressed masses had managed to do away with their exploitation by joining their adversary, there may be a point in examining that path. Unfortunately, none of these propositions appear plausible in the light of historical experience. As for the argument regarding an alliance with the Congress is concerned, it firstly smacks of ignorance of class characterization of these ruling class parties and, secondly, it can be used rather to support the counter-argument that where struggle is the answer compromise can never be its substitute.

The Hindutva overture towards Dalits throws up many such issues. Its implications are far-reaching. Dalits are a crucial segment of Indian society and hold a great transformative potential for the country. The loss of this segment, not in terms of abolition of castes and dissolution of Dalits into where it belongs, the working class of India, but to the forces of right reaction that seek to revive the decadent cultural traditions of this country—that have not only been responsible for dehumanization of entire societies but also for its history of slavery—is going to have a catastrophic impact on the future of this country. On the one hand it will mean a loss of hope for people-oriented transformation at the point when it is most needed, and on the other it will spell doom for the people by deeply entrenching the forces of Fascism in the country. The foremost task of all progressive elements in the country at this juncture is to arrest this trend of Dalits being won over by the Hindutva forces, and win back those who are under their influence for the project of a democratic revolution in the country.

It is with this perspective that this book was conceived. It is divided into two parts. The first part comprising eight essays seeks to provide a theoretical and historical perspective for the problems of Hindutva vis-à-vis Dalits, and the second part, through its eight essays presents the specific manifestation of these problems in the various states of India. Together they are expected to delineate most of the issues involved and also expose the grand strategy followed by the Hindutva forces.

In Part I, Shamsul Islam's essay, makes a convincing case that notwithstanding the egalitarian claims of its protagonists, Hindutva has been intrinsically anti-Dalit both in its theory as well as its practice. In the backdrop of a recent ordinance banning cow slaughter, passed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Madhya Pradesh and its official justification in the name of *Manusmriti* (The Laws of Manu), infamous for its anti-Dalit and anti-women content, he establishes that starting with Savarkar, Golwalkar to Giriraj Kishor of our times, all Hindutva stalwarts have believed and continue to believe that the *Manusmriti* is an essential part of Hinduism and a basic component of Hindutva. The justification stunned the entire nation as it was perhaps the first time in its constitutional history that the government brazenly proffered what could be called an anti-constitutional rationale for its action. But in reality, it was just baring its casteist fangs. The author reminds us that in the wake of the adoption of the Constitution, *Organiser*, the (RSS) organ, had denounced the Constitution as un-Indian, as it was not based on the Manu code. He demolishes the commonplace image of Savarkar that he was opposed to casteism by showing in what veneration he held *Manusmriti*. Savarkar, a prophet of Hindutva, defended casteism in Hindu society and regarded it as a natural component essential for nation-making. Islam exposes the falsehood that RSS does not believe in caste distinctions; that it stands for 'caste-free, creed-free Hindu nationalism'.

The second essay is by me and seeks to solve a popular puzzle about the astonishing reconciliation of xenophobic Hindutva with imperialist globalization and also the apparent correlation between the ascendance of these two phenomena. The Hindutva forces created a good deal of confusion with their *swadeshi* rhetoric and song and dance of cultural nationalism as though they were opposed to globalization. But after coming to power, they have not only continued implementation of the same policies of globalization as initiated by the Congress and carried through by the subsequent governments but also accelerated its pace and deepened its impact. Such a volte-face or change in colour, as seen from history, appears to be a part of the Hindutva character. Globalization not only creates livelihood crisis for people but also robs them of every kind of certainty. This casino syndrome has given rise to religious fundamentalism, obscurantism, and right reaction everywhere. There is an amazing ideological affinity

between Hinduism, which provides Hindutva its ideological sustenance, and neoliberalism which likewise is an ideological source of globalization. The three pivotal aspects of neoliberalism: individualism, competition and free market; its core belief system represented by Social Darwinism, are all ingrained in Hinduism and espoused by Hindutva economics.

Sandeep Pendse's essay searches reasons for the intriguing relationship between Hindutva and the Dalits, which appears to be growing closer these days. He finds that the political and cultural vacuum surrounding the Dalit masses today is paving the way for Hindutva's overtures. The Hindutva forces need to woo Dalits for two reasons: one for expanding their electoral constituency, and two, to preempt a larger unity of all sections of the oppressed people. In order to facilitate this, the RSS has temporarily abandoned its programme of narrow brahminical domination for the creation of a Hindu fascist nation.

Ram Puniyani's essay explains the social engineering of Hindutva that brought about active Dalit participation in the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat: it first creates fear psychosis in Dalits, and then appeals to their latent motivation for Sanskritization and sustains it with competitive distribution of power and money. The historical development of Dalit consciousness in Gujarat that did not interrogate the Hindu mode and their current economic plight that seems to have thrown them in competition with the Muslims are the two significant missing variables in this analysis. The author contends that the politics of Hindu Rashtra is nothing but the new edition of *Manusmriti* in the modern context.

Meena Kandasamy in her essay aims to consolidate Dalit feminist experience and understanding of the brahminical patriarchy of the Hindutva forces. Beginning with a critical analysis of women within the Sangh Parivar, the slogan of *matrishakti* and the reduction of women to womb-bearers by Hindutva, this incisive essay underscores the Sangh Parivar's negation of the fundamental right to equality. She also addresses the issues of cultural imposition and invasion by Hindutva—be it in the mushrooming of war-films, hysteria over beauty contests, or in the vandalism reserved for Valentine's Day. The article contrasts the attitudes of the Sangh Parivar with the actions of the three revolutionaries for caste-annihilation and women's rights, Mahatma

Jotiba Phule, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and Babasaheb Ambedkar, who firmly worked towards the liberation of women as a means to put an end to the heinous caste system. The recent phenomenon of the infiltration of Hindutva into Tamil Nadu—a state renowned for its anti-Brahminism and secular identity—and the constructions of approved identities of saffronized subordination are studied in depth.

Prakash Louis's essay tracks the historicity of Hindutva as a fascist movement and highlights its revivalist aspirations. Through its cultural nationalism, it seeks to bridge the present with the 'glorious' past, which is essentially characterized by the brahminic social order. True to its fascist character, it does not care for divergence between its precepts for appealing to wider sections of society and practice of promoting hegemony of a minority elite caste and class. While so far the Enemy Other is seen in the religious minorities, especially the Muslims, the attitude of the Hindutva forces towards the Dalits is not any different from that towards the minorities. Rather, its history testifies to the enduring contradiction between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces.

Gopal Guru analyses the movement of Dalit youth towards the Hindutva forces. He holds that the forces of globalization and the lack of capital to create conditions of secularism are responsible for the involvement of Dalits in the infamous genocide of Muslims in Gujarat. In the past the stubborn ideological make up of the Dalit movement had rather rendered the Hindutva forces impotent. Why then, of late, have Dalits been found drifting towards the Hindutva forces and becoming their foot soldiers, as in Gujarat? The author gives three reasons. First is the decimation of the public sector under the onslaught of globalization and consequently abolition of the site of caste conflict. The second reason is in terms of Hindutva satisfying the cultural needs of Dalits. The third is in terms of the depletion and destruction of the structures (e.g., industrial units, workers' chawls, and so on) that harboured caste conflict in order to obliterate their class content. At the end he observes that since mainstream Dalit politics has lost the moral stamina to withstand the powerful forces of Hindutva and globalization, Dalits should think about revolutionary politics as an alternative.

Ramesh Kamble problematizes the relationship between Hindutva and Dalits represented by alliances like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or Bhimshakti-Shivshakti and

seeks to understand it in terms of the evolutionary dynamics of the Dalit movement. He proposes that in order to understand this dynamics the journey of the Dalit movement can be mapped in terms of the broad phases of Dalit politics: 'politics of identity', 'politics of issues', 'politics of accommodation' and 'politics of interests'. He argues that the Dalit movement lost its balance between these four components as it evolved and inevitably created space for Hindutva overtures. This happened after the demise of Dr. Ambedkar. Barring a few expressions of radical assertion for dignity and concerns for emancipatory issues, the educated leaders of the Dalit movement pursued the dream of political power as panacea for addressing the Dalit question. In an atmosphere of growing disenfranchisement of Dalits, 'modernist' Buddhism has great emancipatory potential for Dalit politics provided Buddhism is seen rooted in the 'real' conditions that characterize human existence.

The essays in Part II look at Hindutva in practice. Subhash Gatade's paper on Uttar Pradesh tries to look at the trajectory of the BSP, representing Dalit politics in the state, during the last two decades with a special focus on its alliance with the Hindutva political outfit, namely, the BJP. It underlines several contributions of the BSP, such as of reinvigoration of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, widening its base in a qualitative manner; and also highlights its successes in terms of getting out of the 'single caste' status of the earlier Dalit experiments and weaving a 'formidable alliance of "oppressed castes and religious minorities" to further the "core agenda of Dalit assertion" '. The author also notes the significant achievement of the unfolding juggernaut of *Bahujanwad* in its skilful demonstration that the whole idea of homogenized Hindu majority which the Hindutva fascists want to peddle for their immediate as well as long-term ends is a myth. However, he cautions that the obsession with political power at any cost could boomerang on the BSP if its field network does not perceive it as the winning horse. In the concluding part it also raises the point that the new phase in the post-Ambedkar movement has also proved to be another 'opportunity lost' for the resurgent Dalit movement.

Suhas Palshikar's essay presents the analysis of the ideological and political degeneration of Dalit politics in Maharashtra that has reached its culmination symbolized by the equation *'Shivshakti + Bhimshakti = Deshbhakti'* (Alliance of Shiv Sena and Ambedkarite Dalits means true

patriotism). He traces the trajectory of this degeneration in the imperatives of 'parliamentarism' which led Dalit politics away from the Ambedkarian principle of self-help and self-respect. Soon after playing a crucial role in alliance with socialists and communists in the movement for the linguistic state of Maharashtra, Dalit politics fell into the lap of the Congress Party and remained in its control until the emergence of the Hindutva forces in the nineties. Even the Dalit Panthers, who tried to restore the radical legacy of Ambedkar through its militant struggle could not save it and instead followed the same path. He perceptively observes that the BSP had done enough damage to Ambedkar's legacy even before the Hindutva overtures and contributed to the trivialization of Ambedkar.

V. Geetha takes stock of the Tamil Nadu situation in her essay and attempts to identify the factors that are responsible for the rise of Hindutva in the state that once was characterized by its antithetical Dravidian radicalism. The foremost reason she cites is the ideological degeneration of the Dravidian movement in the state. In relation to Dalits, it is reflected in the increasing instances of violence against Dalits, which in turn implies that the Dravidian movement has differentially benefited the backward castes vis-à-vis Dalits. The retreat of the state as the guarantor of the commonwealth and its turning dictatorial in favour of the powerful has left Dalits without a means for justice or redressal. The combined effect of all these developments pushes Dalits and other oppressed communities into the lap of Hindutva forces.

Navpreet Kaur discusses recent caste clashes in the Jalandhar district between the members of Jats and Dalit communities. She deals with the recent and reportedly the first case of caste violence in Punjab which has interestingly happened in the area which is called 'NRI Land' as every Dalit family here has at least one member working in some western country. The conflict erupted when the Dalits constituted a separate management committee for the Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Gurdwara as the earlier management committee comprising Jats stopped Dalit women from preparing the langar. She contends that the Dalits in Punjab have historically articulated their religious identity in order to undermine caste-based dominations and oppressions. The Talhan incident proves that the economic status of Dalits does not

guarantee them protection against caste discrimination and oppression.

The specific manifestation of Hindutva in Andhra Pradesh in relation to Dalits is discussed by K. S. Chalam. He contends that all the major regions of the state have distinct socioeconomic characteristics and hence it is difficult to have a broad brush analysis applicable either for Dalits or Hindutva over the entire state. The historical context, the weak presence of Brahmins in Andhra and a large number of Dalits having converted to Islam and Christianity; the latter exercising a palpable influence in socio-cultural matters, explains the potential odds against the Hindutva forces in making direct inroads among Dalits. The greatest counterforce to Hindutva comes from the legacy of glorious struggles that the people from Andhra, particularly Telangana and Srikakulam, waged for the emancipation of the poor and Dalits. The consciousness of this camaraderie still acts as a heavy counterforce against Hindutva to raise its head directly. In order to thwart the seeming wave of the BSP in the state, the BJP, which had some pockets of influence among the Madiga community in Hyderabad, ignited the Mala-Madiga divide amongst Dalits.

Shivasundar in his essay traces out the influence of Hindutva on the Dalit movement in Karnataka, which he observes was influenced in a very limited way by the Dalit movement in neighbouring Maharashtra led by Dr. Ambedkar. It was instead moulded by the mainstream political currents in the state. Dalit movements in various regions of the state thus reflect different influences ranging from the Congress Party to communists. During the freedom movement none of these currents took the Dalit agenda to the fore or mobilized Dalits against the caste system. It was only in the late 1970s that the Dalit movement in Karnataka took the Ambedkarite path in the form of Dalit Sangharasha Samithi that undertook struggles not only for the self-respect of Dalits, but also for the creation of an alternate society with a kind of socialist vision, which may be characterized as an ideological amalgam of Marx, Lohia and Ambedkar. However, it could not hold out for long and by the mid-1980s got incorporated by the mainstream forces. By the late 1990s, Dalit organizations mostly shifted to the cities with political opportunism and fundamentalism as their principal course. The vacuum left in rural Karnataka was quickly occupied by the RSS Shakhas.

Subhash Gatade and I in our essay on Gujarat search the factors that transformed the Dalits into Hindutva's foot soldiers. While recounting the peculiarities of Gujarat in terms of its Dalits sans 'Dalit' consciousness and the development paradigm that intensified spatial, social and economic disparities, it highlights the role played by the policies of globalization that threw thousands of workers on roads and the Hindutva's rhetorical regime that not only worsened people's livelihood but also injected communal venom into them. Dalits have always been a pivotal group to the conception of Hindutva; in the latter's *Sanghatan* phase they constituted a target group to be lured back as Hindus, and in the fascist phase, they constituted the frenzied mass to fight street battles and be squandered. The revivalist agenda of Hindutva can only offer Dalits a spectre of slavery.

T. K. Ramachandran and P. T. John outline the methods followed by Hindutva forces in making inroads into the tribal belt of Wyanad in Kerala. Despite the odds against the construction of a pan-Hindu identity encompassing Adivasis and Dalits, Hindutva forces significantly succeeded in wooing these oppressed people all over the country in varying measures. True to their fascist lineage, they sought to control the entire range of discourse in civil society.

Collectively the papers in this volume thus provide multiple theoretical perspectives for situating the problem of Hindutva vis-à-vis Dalits and for understanding its various dimensions. They also provide some representative cases of its practical manifestation which would illustrate the underlying dynamics of their relationships and also expose the strategies that brought them about. As is expected in such an exploratory exercise, one may find a certain amount of conflict and contradictions in the viewpoints presented. They are there by design; no attempt has been made to present a unified view of the problem simply because it does not exist.

Notes

1. An important Marxist tradition maintains that Fascism is a feature not just of capitalism in crisis but of capitalism in crisis in its imperialist stage and prevails among imperialist countries only. See Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularism* (Delhi: Vistaar, 1997): 245. Besides various Marxist approaches there are several non-Marxist approaches to theorize Fascism. Stanley G. Payne lists eleven different ways of attempting to theorise the phenomenon of Fascism. See Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).
2. Indian Fascism needs to be viewed as a 'historic-logical concept', which tries to ground it in 'the context of developments related to globalization, liberalization and the related developments of deprivation and crises in surplus accumulation'. To dismiss the BJP as being fascist implies negation of the constitution of Fascism—from being a party to being a mass movement and then a regime. It need not always mean a regime. Similarly, terming the current phenomenon as simply communal (as generating hatred based on religious identity) 'tends to overlook its politico-economic content and emphasizes exclusively its cultural-ideological colour'. See Pratyush Chandra, 'On Fascism in India', *Correspondence*, 1 (March 2003), Indian Institute of Marxist Studies.
3. Payne's three-part model comprises *(a)* fascist negation; *(b)* generic ideological motifs and goals; and *(c)* special and common features of style and organization. Vanaik has discussed Hindu communalism vis-à-vis this model. See Vanaik, *Communalism Contested:* 238.
4. The Satnami movement of the Chamars in the Chhattisgarh plains in eastern Madhya Pradesh that eventually became an independent religious sect and carved out a separate identity of 'Satnami' for its adherents (R. V. Russel and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (London: Macmillan, 1916) and the 'Adi' movements of UP, Madras and Punjab by the untouchables had all claimed a separate identity of an original race. See M. Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: the Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth-Century Punjab* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982): 115-23; Chandrika Prasad Jijnasu, *Adi Hindu Andolan ka Prabartak Sri Swami Acchutanand Harihar* (Lucknow, 1968, 2nd ed): 9-10. The most pervasive Dalit movement led by Babasaheb Ambedkar reached its climax in mass conversion to Buddhism and gave Dalits a new identity as Nav Buddhists. (Eleanor Zelliot, 'Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement' Ph. D. Diss,

University of Pennsylvania, 1969.) All these movements signified an overriding hatred for the religious code of Manu and dejection with Brahminism, which was perceived to be the root cause for their sufferings. The most articulate expression of this dejection came in Ambedkar's own analyses that hold overthrowing of the 'Hindu' religious ideological hegemony as a necessary condition for the liberation of Dalits (Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* (Delhi: Sage, 1994: 338).

5. Christophe Jafferlot, 'BJP and the Caste Barrier: Beyond the 'Twice-Born'? In *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India,* edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 23.
6. Organiser, 1 December, 1952, p.7.
7. M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publication, 1939): 63.
8. Jaffrelot, in Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot eds,: 'BJP and Caste Barrier': 24.
9. Cited in J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-47* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 231.
10. Deendayal Upadhyaya, *Integral Humanism* (Delhi: Bharatiya Jan Sangh, 1965): 43.
11. The atrocities against Dalits show consistent increase even during the recent years:

Atrocities: Record of Increase

Year	Murders	Serious Injury	Rape	Arson
Pre-Reform years 1981-1986	523.17	1,416.8	666.3	1046.3
Post-Reform years 1995-1997	539.3	4197	929.3	449.3
% Increase during Reform-years over the pre-Reform years	3.1	196.1	39.5	-57.1

Atrocities: Record of Increase (cont.)

Year	Others	Crime under POA	Total
Pre-Reform years 1981-1986	11,530.1	10,057.6	25,237.3
Post-Reform years 1995-1997	12,356.3	10,458.7	28,929.9
% Increase during Reform-years over the pre-Reform years	7.2	4.0	14.6

Source: Computed from the figures from the reports of National Commission for SCs and STs. See Anand Teltumbde, 'Impact of Imperialist Globalisation on Dalits (Oppressed Castes) in India', paper presented in Mumbai Resistance 2004, available at: http://www. mumbairesistance. org/Papers/list.htm.

12. The discussions with Valjibhai Patel, a noted Dalit activist, based in Ahmedabad who as the President of Council For Social Justice is closely monitoring the cases in Gujarat, revealed that the Dalits constitute a small percentage of the accused. They have been involved in minor cases in the city areas of Ahmedabad. Outside Ahmedabad, he has come across many cases of Dalits sheltering Muslims and thereby incurring the wealth of upper caste hooligans.

PART I

Theoretical Perspectives

1

Dalits in the Theory and Practice of Hindutva

Shamsul Islam

On 23 January 2004, a few days before the Indian Republic was to celebrate its fifty-fifth anniversary, the BJP Government of Madhya Pradesh led by a seasoned RSS cadre, Uma Bharti, promulgated an ordinance banning cow slaughter in the state. Astonishingly, the official statement explaining the rationale behind this step referred to *Manusmriti* (The Laws of Manu) to justify the ban. It read: '*Manusmriti* ranks the slaughterer of cow as predator and prescribes hard punishment for him.'[1] Uma Bharti, a well-known sadhvi of the RSS, needs no introduction. She played a highly nefarious role as an orator in spreading hatred against Muslims in the late 1980s, which subsequently led to the organized carnage of Muslims in different parts of the country and ultimately the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992.

This is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of a ban on cow slaughter.[2] But the most worrisome aspect of this announcement was the official commitment of the Uma Bharti government to enforce the *Manusmriti* as part of the constitutional law of the country. It was for the first time in the legal history of independent India that a law was being justified for being in tune with the *Manusmriti*. It is to be noted here that Dr. Ambedkar had burnt a copy of the *Manusmriti* at the Mahad conference in 1927 for its fascist anti-Dalit, anti-women stance and total disregard of the principles of equality, justice and humanism.[3] The Uma Bharti government's commitment to follow *Manusmriti* was in brazen contravention of the basic principles of the Constitution which through its preamble committed itself 'to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression,

belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all, Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual . . .' Such an allegiance to the *Manusmriti* which openly preached hatred against Shudras also meant that the Madhya Pradesh government was not committed to the enforcement of Article 17 of the Constitution which declared that 'Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.'

The Codes or Laws of Manu are universally known as the anti-thesis to the existence and rights of Dalits and women. *Manusmriti* or *Manav Dharmasastra* also known as the Laws of Manu is believed to have been codified by the second century A.D. It presents in totality the system of jurisprudence of Hinduism. The German Indologist, Max Mueller got this translated as the 'Laws of Manu', which was first, published in 1886 under the series, *The Sacred Books of the East*. Manu as an eminent learned Brahmin holds a place of reverence in the high caste Hindu world of thought. Besides prescribing persecution for cow slaughter as claimed by the Madhya Pradesh government, as mentioned earlier, it denigrates lower castes and women. There has been a demand to instal a magnificent statue of Manu in the Parliament House in Delhi, and one such statue stands outside the High Court of Rajasthan in Jaipur, despite strong protest from the Dalit organizations.

The parts of *Manusmriti* reproduced later do not need much explanation and commentary. They are excessively venomous and make many objectionable and insulting statements against untouchables who are referred to as Shudras by Manu. Perhaps this was the reason that the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche whose ideas of 'supermen' and the 'will to power' were widely used in the growth of totalitarianism in Europe in the twentieth century, fell in love with this work. The philosophical basis of the perpetual persecution of untouchables in the whole of the Indian subcontinent came from Manu who influenced even the Muslim ruling elite of this region as we find casteism percolating into Muslim societies and high caste Muslim rulers using caste divisions to perpetuate their unjust rule.[4] There have also been innumerable instances when Muslim rulers had cordial, social, political, fraternal, and even marital relations with the sections of high caste Hindus rather than interacting with lower caste Muslims

of Indian origin. In Pakistan, lower caste Muslims are referred as *kammi* and *mussali* (mean) by the *shurafa* or high caste Muslims, who are regarded as the natural rulers.

Recently, coinciding with the political ascendancy of the RSS there has been a flood of low-priced mass editions of *Manusmriti* throughout India. In one edition brought out by Sadhna Pocket Books, one of the biggest publishers of pocket books in Hindi, the back cover explains the significance of this book in the following words. 'The *Manusmriti* is the oldest social system of the world which establishes constitution and justice. Largely the social and judicial systems of today's India are modelled after this book. It is an essential book for each family, organization and society.' Such publishers are unconcerned about the poison and hatred, which *Manusmriti* contains and spreads against Dalits. There seems to be a strong linkage between the mass publication of such books and increasing violence against Dalits in the country.

If the Uma Bharti government has begun the process of implementing the Laws of Manu that is surely going to be the end of the road for Dalits and women in India. To what miserable and dehumanized status their lives will be reduced can be known by having a glance of the Manu Codes about them. Following are some of the prescriptions of Manu for Shudras.[5]

> For the sake of the prosperity of the worlds [the divine one] caused the Brahmana, the Kashtriya, the Vaisya and the Shudra to proceed from His mouth, His arm, His thighs and His feet. (I/31) One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudras, to serve meekly these [other] three castes. (I/91) A Shudra, who insults a high caste man with gross invective, shall have his tongue cut out for he is of low origin. (VIII/270) If he [Shudra] arrogantly teaches Brahmanas their duty, the king shall cause hot oil to be poured into his mouth and into his ears. (VIII/272) A low-caste man, who tries to place himself on the same seat with a man of high caste, shall be branded on his hips and be banished, or [the king] shall cause his buttocks to be gashed. (VIII/281) Let [the first part of] a Brahmana's name [denote something] auspicious, a Kshatriya's be connected with power, and a Vaisya's with wealth, but a Shudra's [express

> something] contemptible. (II/31) [The second part of] a Brahmana's [name] shall be [a word] implying happiness, of a Kshatriya's [a word] implying protection, of a Vaisya's [a term] expressive of thriving, and of a Shudra's [an expression] denoting service. (II/32) The service of Brahmanas alone is declared [to be] an excellent occupation for a Shudra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear him no fruit. (X/123) The remnants of their food must be given to him, as well as their old clothes, the refuse of their grain, and their old household furniture. (X/125) No collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra, even though he be able [to do it]; for a Shudra who has acquired wealth, gives pain to Brahmanas. (X/129) The son of a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, and a Vaisya by a Shudra [wife] receives no share of the inheritance; whatever his father may give to him, that shall be his property. (IX/155)
>
> Let him [Brahmana] not dwell in a country where the rulers are Shudras, nor in one which is surrounded by unrighteous men, nor in one which has become subject to heretics, nor in one swarming with men of the lowest castes. (IV/61) Let a Brahmna not give to a Shudra advice, nor the remnants [of his meal], nor food offered to the gods; nor let him explain the sacred law [to such a man], nor impose [upon him] a penance. (IV/80) For he who explains the sacred law [to a Shudra] or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that [man] into the hell [called] Asamvrita. (IV/81)

On women *Manusmriti's* prescriptions are no less obnoxious.

> Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males [of] their [families], and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. (IX/2) Her father protects [her] in childhood, her husband protects [her] in youth and her sons protect [her] in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (IX/3) [When creating them] Manu allotted to women [a love of their] bed, [of their] seat and [of] ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty,

> malice, and bad conduct. (IX/17) Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal to their husbands, however, carefully they may be guarded in this world. (IX/15) For women no [sacramental] rite [is performed] with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; women [who are] destitute of strength and destitute of [the knowledge of] Vedic texts [are as impure as] the falsehood [itself], that is a fixed rule. (IX/18)

It has been a long-standing demand of the RSS to replace the Indian Constitution with the Laws of Manu as specified in *Manusmriti*. When the Constituent Assembly of India finally passed the Constitution (26 November 1949), the RSS journal, *Organiser,* came out with an editorial (30 November 1949) titled 'Constitution':

> The worst about the new Constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bhartiya about it . . . There is no trace of ancient Bhartiya constitutional laws, institutions, nomenclatures and phraseology in it...Manu's Laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this day his laws as enunciated in the *Manusmriti* excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.

That the *Manusmriti* is held to be holy and sacred by the Hindu Right will be clear from the following utterances of the philosopher and guide of Hindutva and the RSS, V. D. Savarkar. According to him, '*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on *Manusmriti.* Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu Law.'[6]

India came to be declared as a Sovereign Democratic Republic on 26 January 1950. On this eve, Sankar Subba Aiyar, a retired High

Court Judge demanded on behalf of the RSS the immediate promulgation of the Manu Code. He wrote in the RSS organ ('Manu Rules Our Hearts'): 'Even though Dr. Ambedkar is reported to have recently stated in Bombay, that the days of Manu have ended it is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even at the present day affected by principles and injunctions contained in *Manu Smrithi* and other *Smrithis*. Even an unorthodox Hindu feels himself bound at least in some matters by the rules contained in the *Smrithis* and he feels powerless to give up altogether his adherence to them.'[7]

The Uma Bharti government's reference to the sanctions of Manu is in fact a fulfilment of Hindutva's old dream of converting the Indian Republic into a theocracy with complete brahminical hegemony. The cow may be the mascot but the real price will have to be paid by common Dalits and women. The tragedy is that there are no whistle-blowers for the Republic of India. The flag-bearers of the Sovereign Democratic Secular India seem to be in coma waiting for the Hindutva gang to make public the obituary of the Indian Republic.

Developments in Madhya Pradesh leading to the enforcement of *Manusmriti* are not isolated happenings. These, in fact, reflect the continuation of the true ideological commitment of the RSS, which believes in the total denigration of Dalits. Its deep hatred for Muslims and Christians is the outcome of its canonical hatred for Dalits as most of the followers of above religions hail from the Dalit stock. From the RSS point of view they need to be taught an unprecedented lesson for daring to improve their social status by converting to these religions.

It is often claimed by the RSS that it does not believe in caste distinctions: for them all Hindus are one. According to their arguments, the RSS stands for 'caste-free, creed-free Hindu nationalism'.[8] A study of its internal documents since its inception in 1925 clearly reveals that it has been committed to the *Manusmriti*. In practice too, it steadfastly stood for brahminical hegemony over Indian society.

Its belief in brahminical superiority can be easily seen in its documents which deal with the biographical details of its founder, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The study of documents pertaining to the period when he led the RSS (1925-1940) unequivocally proves that under his leadership the organization developed as a citadel of brahminical superiority, which characteristic it has retained throughout its history. RSS literature tells us that he was born into a very superior Brahmin

family that could allegedly draw its lineage from the times of the Rig Veda. The whole stress is on underlining the 'fact' that Hedgewar hailed from a highly noble Brahmin family. The glorification of this past lineage of Hedgewar is surprising as the RSS claims to be working for establishing a Hindu society sans caste. According to an RSS publication, the Hedgewar family originally hailed from Kandkurti village in Telangana (presently in Andhra Pradesh), with the following caste details:

> They were *Deshastha* Brahmins of *Shakala* branch, belonging to the *Ashwalayana Sutra* of the Rig Veda. Their *gotra* was *Kashyapa,* and learning and transmission of Vedas, was their sole preoccupation. The *agnihotra* too was in vogue. There are documents indicating that in the course of his travels, *Sri Shankaracharya* used to nominate some one from the Hedgewar family to be in charge of propagation of *Dharma* in this area. Many are the families claiming to be followers of the Hedgewars, and their family documents speak with utmost reverence of the Hedgewars saying *Hedage Kulaguru poorvapara, jaise suryavamsha Vasisthavara* (The tradition of Hedge family is glorious like that of *Vasishtha* in the solar dynasty).[9]

The high caste bias in RSS recruitment could easily be seen in Hedgewar's directive that new recruits should be graduates. This would automatically check entry of low caste Hindus as most had not received formal education then. According to Hedgewar's biography published by the RSS, 'He was very particular that the Swayamsevaks should at least be graduates, because, in the initial stages of the organization especially, when the people were entirely unaware of the nature of the work, a university degree would naturally increase the credibility of the worker.'[10]

How the caste factor determined entry into the RSS would be clearly known by another incident re-told in an RSS publication. According to the procedure for recruitment, Hedgewar personally interviewed every new entrant and only when he was satisfied was membership allowed. Once a person approached Hedgewar for seeking membership, and when Hedgewar inquired about his caste he told that he belonged

to a 'non-Brahmin' caste. Hedgewar not only refused to accept such a caste in Hinduism but also declared, 'It is harmful for the nation to believe that one is not part of any of the specific castes of which Hindu society is formed. This gives rise to caste enmity and causes harm.'[11] When the concerned person refused to budge from his standpoint, Hedgewar retorted: 'You can not be admitted in RSS as you are against one specific caste out of many [four] castes of Hinduism. RSS is the organization of all Hindus. Here Hindu of one caste cannot be inimical to Hindu of another caste.'[12]

It is only through RSS literature that we come to know that Hedgewar did not mind practicing the inhuman custom of Untouchability in order not to antagonize high caste sympathizers. In Nasik, Hedgewar went to the house of a Brahmin known as Dr. Gaidhani along with Krishna Rao Wadekar and Bhaskar Rao Ninave. When the time for meals came, Ninave who happened to be from a low caste asked Hedgewar whether he should sit separately for meals, as was commonly practised. When Wadekar suggested that there was no need for it, as Gaidhani had no way to know Ninave's caste, Hedgewar openly disagreed with the suggestion. He ordered Ninave to eat sitting separately from the Brahmins. Hedgewar's logic was that it would cause immense pain to Gaidhani. He went on to say,

> and what benefit we will get out of it? On the contrary if he sits separately for the meals that [action of his] will leave a far better impression on Gaidhaniji. Our *swayamsevak* may feel a bit hurt but in the view of our work this much pain should be tolerated. First we should win him with our love then these differences will disappear.[13]

It may be relevant to know here that Hedgewar discouraged any attempt for community lunches (*sah-bhoj*) inclusive of all castes of Hindus which were being organized by a section of reformist Hindus in order to abolish the practice of Untouchability.[14]

The Hindutva of Savarkar is often highlighted for its anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rhetoric but his aggressive defence of the *chaturvarna* (the four varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) sys-

tem, the forerunner of the casteism, is conveniently downplayed. Savarkar as a prophet of Hindutva defended casteism in Hindu society and regarded it as a natural component essential for making a nation. While dealing with the subject under the title 'Institutions in favour of Nationality' he declared that the institution of casteism was the peculiar mark of identifying a Hindu Nation.'[15] 'The system of four varnas which could not be wiped away even under the Buddhistic sway, grew in popularity to such an extent that kings and emperors felt it a distinction to be called one who established the system of four varnas . . . Reaction in favour of this institution grew so strong that our nationality was almost getting identified with it.'[16] Savarkar in defence of casteism as an integral constituent of the Hindu nation went on to quote an authority (not identified by him) that said: 'The land where the system of four Varnas does not exist should be known as the Mlechcha[17] country: Aryawarta lies away from it.'[18] His defence of casteism was in fact a corollary of his racial approach to the understanding of Hindu nation. While refuting the criticism that casteism did check the free flow of blood in the Hindu society he argued that it was due to casteism that the purity of Hindu race was maintained:

> For the very castes, which you owing to your colossal failure to understand and view them in the right perspective, assert to have barred the common flow of blood into our race, have done so more truly and more effectively as regards the foreign blood than our own . . . all that the caste system has done is to regulate its noble blood on lines believed—and on the whole rightly believed—by our saintly and patriotic law-givers and kings to contribute most to fertilize and enrich all that was barren and poor, without famishing and debasing all that was flourishing and nobly endowed.'[19]

Interestingly, Savarkar who stood steadfastly in defence of casteism also advocated the elevation of the status of the untouchables in the Hindu society. He organized programmes against Untouchability, strongly pleaded for their entry into Hindu temples and for letting them share water wells and ponds with others. This was not due to an egalitarian outlook or urge for providing equality to them but mainly

due to the fact that he was alarmed at the numerical loss which the Hindu community had been experiencing due to the steady conversion of the untouchables to Islam and Christianity which guaranteed them more social equality.[20] Moreover, as he himself admitted, due to treating them as outcastes, the then seven-crore (70-million) strong, 'Hindu people-power' did not stand in 'Our' [High caste Hindus] favour.[21] Savarkar knew that Hindutva would greatly need the services of these untouchables, as foot soldiers for settling scores with Muslims and Christians. So while warning Hindutva cadres that if the untouchables did not remain in their fold, they were going to be a factor which would bring far more terrible crisis for high caste Hindus, Savarkar lamented the fact that 'they will not only cease to be beneficial for us but also become an easy means of dividing our house thus proving to be responsible for our boundless loss.'[22] Otherwise, Savarkar remained a great protagonist of casteism and worshipper of *Manusmriti* throughout his life. We have already observed how Savarkar regarded *Manusmriti* as a scripture 'which is most worshipable after the Vedas' and declared it to be today's 'Hindu Law'.

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar who headed the RSS during 1940-1973, and is regarded as the greatest guide and philosopher of the RSS, like Savarkar believed that the division of the Hindu society into four varnas was a natural and integral part of Hinduism. In fact, Golwalkar went to the extent of declaring that casteism was synonymous with Hindu nation. According to him Hindu people are none else but

> the *Virat Purusha,* the Almighty manifesting himself . . . [according to *Purusha Sukta*] sun and moon are his eyes, the stars and the skies are created from his *nabhi* [navel] and Brahmin is the head, king [Kshatriyas] the hands, Vaishya the thighs and Shudras the feet. This means that the people who have this fourfold arrangement, i.e., the Hindu People, is [sic] our God. This supreme vision of Godhead is the very core of our concept of 'nation' and has permeated our thinking and given rise to various unique concepts of our cultural heritage.[23]

This was nothing but re-phrasing of Manu's terrible inhuman anti-Shudra codes. Golwalkar refused to accept that casteism was a bane of Hinduism or that it hindered feelings of unity among Hindus.

> Persons interested in calumniating Hindus, make much of the caste system, the 'superstitions', the want of literacy, the position of women in the social structure, and all sorts of true or untrue flaws in the Hindu cultural organisation, and point out that the weakness of the Hindus lies solely in these.[24]

He drew an interesting analogy to support casteism by drawing attention towards 'golden' periods of Hindu history like the time of the *Mahabharata* and the rule of Harshwardhan where 'all the so called evils of caste, etc., were there no less marked than today and yet we were a victorious glorious nation then. Were not the bonds of caste, illiteracy, etc., at least as stringent as now, there when the country witnessed the grand upheaval of the Hindu Nation under Shivaji?'[25]

Golwalkar went to the extent of calling all those who disown their 'cultural heritage' (which of course included unquestioned belief in casteism) as an anti-national and degenerated lot. He lamented the fact that such people with their 'unreasonable' and 'unjustifiable' attitudes were simply frittering 'energy in anti-national work and lay the blame upon the social order and such other things which have nothing to do with National revival . . . it is none of the so called drawbacks of the Hindu social order, which prevents us from regaining our ancient glory, but it is only the want of proper national feeling.'[26]

Casteism was so deeply ingrained in Golwalkar's philosophy of Hindu Nation that he made an amazing discovery that it was dismantling of the caste structure which facilitated the spread of Muslim rule in India. He manufactured his own facts to make the following claim:

> We know as a matter of history that our north-western and north-eastern areas, where the influence of Buddhism has disrupted the caste system, fell on easy prey to the onslaughts of Muslims . . . But the areas of Delhi which were considered to be very orthodox and rigid in caste restrictions, remained predominately Hindu after remaining as the very citadels of Muslim power and fanaticism for a number of centuries.[27]

Golwalkar's theory for conversions to Islam is fraught with terrible misrepresentation of facts. He cleverly glosses over the evidence that the 'Muslim' rulers with their seats of power in and around Delhi received full cooperation from the high caste Hindu oligarchy of the area.

Even after independence Golwalkar and RSS remained deeply concerned about the sanctity and utility of casteism in the Hindu society. Though he denounced Untouchability, when the founding fathers of the Constitution of independent India made provisions for reservations to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Golwalkar strongly reacted by alleging that the rulers were digging at the roots of Hindu social cohesion and destroying the spirit of identity that held various sects into a harmonious whole in the past.[28] He refused to admit that the Hindu social system was at the root of the neglect of the lower castes.[29] On the contrary, he held constitutional safeguards for the Scheduled Castes responsible for creating disharmony.

> Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for 'Scheduled Castes' for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society.'[30]

We have already observed how the RSS has always been demanding promulgation of the *Manusmriti* as the law of 'Hindusthan', replacing the republican Constitution of India which aimed at establishing a just, secular and democratic polity. Golwalkar argued that anti-caste tirade was venom that had poisoned the body politic. Indeed, the RSS top brass had never been able to hide the fact that they wanted to recreate a 'golden' past of which casteism was an integral part. Its journal, *Organiser,* while engaged in a debate with the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, over the issue of relevance of the past commented that Nehru was wrong in assuming that RSS wanted to take the nation back to 200 years. It declared that, in fact, 'we want actually to take the nation even further back, a thousand years back.'[31]

Deendayal Upadhyaya was the most prominent ideologue of the RSS after Golwalkar who played a pioneer role in re-modelling Hindutva. Upadhyaya, who hailed from a Brahmin family of Mathura district, came in contact with the RSS in 1937 and became a loyal follower of Golwalkar. Upadhyaya as a full timer of the organization

figured prominently in the RSS hierarchy and held crucial posts therein. He was the editor of the RSS Hindi organs like *Panchajanya* and *Swadesh.* Later, his services were lent to the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the political outfit created by the RSS. He rose to be its president (December 1967) and continued until his death under mysterious circumstances on 1 February 1968 at Mughalsarai in eastern Uttar Pradesh.[32]

Upadhyaya was no exception and supported casteism by describing it as not only natural but also practical. He went to the extent of equating it with *swadharma* (one's own religion). In fact, he declared inequality to be natural to the human society and thus considered casteism also as a natural institution. Says he,

> Even though slogans of equality are raised in the modern world, the concept of equality has to be accepted with discretion. Our actual experience is that from the practical and material point of view, no two men are like. Their looks and colour of skin and their physical build are different as are their inherent qualities. Considerable bitterness could be avoided if the idea of equality as conceived by Hindu thinkers is studied more carefully. The first and basic premise is that even if men have different qualities and different kinds of duties allotted to them according to their qualities or aptitudes, all duties are equally dignified. This is called *swadharma,* and there is an unequivocal assurance that to follow *swadharma* is itself equivalent to the worship of God. So, in any duties performed to fulfil *swadharma,* the question of high and low, dignified and undignified does not arise at all. If the duty is done without selfishness, no blame attaches itself to the doer.[33]

It is due to this pro-Manu, anti-Dalit philosophical legacy of the RSS that the Hindu Right upholds the banner of Hindutva. This philosophy, which has ruled India from 1998-2004, is totally unconcerned about mounting atrocities against the Dalits. Thus the states where maximum incidents of caste atrocities are taking place (Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana) are the states where either

RSS/BJP has a substantial social base or which are being ruled by them or by their allies. In fact, Uttar Pradesh, which for the last several years has been ruled by BJP/RSS stands first in atrocities against the Dalits.

The barbaric lynching of five Dalit youths in Haryana in October 2002 once again exposes the role of Hindutva in instigating violence against Dalits. The *Indian Express* under the caption 'They were skinning a dead cow to sell hide, local VHP and Shiv Sena spread rumour of cow slaughter: 5 Dalits lynched in Haryana, entire administration watches' had reported how the Hindutva brigade organized the killing of the poor Dalits. The report from Jhajjar, Haryana dated 16 October stated[34]:

> Less than two hours from the capital, this was the scene today outside the Dulena police post in Jhajjar district: patches of blood on the road, a pile of smouldering ashes. This is where five Dalits, all in their 20s, were beaten to death last night, two of them torched. They were doing what they have been doing for years: skinning dead cows to sell the hide. This time, however, 'someone' spread the word that the cow was alive. So a mob, returning after the Dussehra fair, dragged them out of the police post where they had taken refuge and lynched them to the cries of Gau mata ki jai. Watched by the City Magistrate, the DSP of Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh, the Municipal Corporator's husband, the Block Development Officer and at least 50 policemen . . . . One FIR has been registered against 'unknown people,' while a second has been filed against the victims under the Cow Slaughter Act. Local office-bearers of the VHP and the Shiv Sena have submitted a memorandum to the local police asking them not to take any action against the guilty.

The *Indian Express* spoke to several eyewitnesses and district officials to reconstruct the incident. And they suggested this was no impulsive act, the frenzy built up over a good three and a half hours; the Dalits were first 'spotted' at 6.30 pm, beaten and dragged to the police post and then battered to death between 9 and 10 pm. Shockingly, Giriraj Kishor, senior leader of VHP, showing once again hatred for Dalits, declared that the life of a cow was more important than any number of

people. This kind of justification of lynching of Dalits was so nauseating that *The Hindu*, another prominent English daily expressed the anger of civil society when it editorially commented: 'The VHP leader's observation, as has been reported, that the life of a cow is very important, according to the shastras, is only a premise to suggest that the life of five Dalits who were killed were not as important. There cannot be a place for men with such ideas in a modern society and the civil administration at this stage cannot gloss over such remarks as merely another instance of raving and ranting by someone constituting the lunatic fringe of society. The danger in seeking to establish such abhorrent notions as the "national sentiment" is all too apparent.'[35]

Earlier, the *Hindustan Times,* an English daily with one of the largest circulations, while describing the depressing scenario in Uttar Pradesh wrote:

> It has become routine for the landless Dalits to be treated as outsiders, humiliated, beaten and murdered, and their women raped and paraded naked, often as public spectacle, to teach the entire community a lesson. The perpetrators almost always belong to the upper castes, who know that the political system is their monopoly that they will get away with almost any outrage. It is hardly a matter of surprise, therefore, that in the course of just one week, two massacres have taken place in Uttar Pradesh, in Jahrana and Hasanpur in Aligarh and Fatehpur districts. A little girl has been raped, women and children have been murdered by the torchbearers of feudal pride. What was till now a free run for Ranvir Sena in Laloo Yadav's Bihar seems to becoming a predictable pattern in Rajnath Singh's UP . . . If the Dalits are complaining that the BJP led government patronizes the upper castes, they are telling the truth. What was Naresh Majhi's crime that his employers burnt alive his wife and five children in early April? A bonded labourer at a brick kiln in Hathras, Majhi had merely demanded his wages. On June 9, a Dalit was savagely beaten and his wife burnt alive in Kusumpur village in Jalaun district in UP in front of the entire village because the family had dared to campaign against the upper caste candidate in the panchayat elections. [36]

Delhi, the capital of the biggest democracy on this earth does not seem to be different from Uttar Pradesh as far as hatred for Dalits is concerned. How grave the situation is in the capital of India, can be known by the following report from correspondent Sanjay K Singh in *The Statesman,* 5 February 2002:

> The worst of Indian caste prejudices was demonstrated in the heart of Delhi, in a function attended by among others, Mr. L. K. Advani. Organizers of a function in Vasant Kunj Institutional Area forced 10 families to leave their homes at 5 a.m. on February 1 because the latter's presence would have 'polluted' the atmosphere at a havan. Mr. Advani attended the havan, which was followed by his laying the foundation stone for the Vedic Studies and Social Services. The organizers, the Sri Rama Vitthal Shikshana Sewa Samiti, and the Sudesh Foundation, who had taken out newspaper advertisements announcing the function on 1 February, could not be contacted despite repeated efforts by the correspondent . . . The 10 families who were unceremoniously dragged out of their homes and asked to shift to a forest area 300 meters away, at 5 a.m. on February 1, belong to the Jusadh caste (originally from Mahoba area in Uttar Pradesh). They were told by the organizers that their presence at the venue of havan will be inauspicious. *'Meri taang tooti hui hai aur mujhe phir bhi jane ko kaha kyonki hum jusadh hain. Bade log to dus baje aaye lekin hamen subah paanch baje hi thhand mein bhaga diya* (I have a broken leg but they told me to leave because I belong to a lower caste. Though the VIPs came at 10 a.m., we were forced to shift at 5 a.m. when it was freezing cold)' said 55-year-old Jamuni Devi.'

Tamil Nadu is witnessing a resurgence of Hindutva and with this there has been an eruption of violence against Dalits. According to a report in *The Hindu*, 'Despite police action against the practice of Untouchability in tea shops of rural Tamil Nadu, several shopkeepers, under pressure from caste Hindus, continue with the discriminatory 'two-tumbler system'. In the caste-riven state, tea shops in several villages do not serve just hot beverages but also trade Untouchability

in "two-tumblers"—cheap glass ones for the Dalits and shiny stainless steel containers for the caste Hindus. And now, a "three-tumbler" system too is adopted in some areas- plastic cups for outsiders whose caste identity is not known.'[37]

Another report from Tamil Nadu describes in details what is happening. 'Numerous are the ways in which Dalits are tormented. They are murdered and maimed; women are raped; their children are abused and deprived of schooling; they are dispossessed of their property; their houses are torched; they are denied their legitimate rights and their sources of livelihood are destroyed. Adding to the long list of atrocities committed on Dalits were two incidents reported recently in Tamil Nadu, in which three Dalits were forced to consume human waste.'

> On September 5, at Kaundampatti in Dindigul district, Sankan, a Dalit agricultural worker, was forced to drink urine—for having lodged with the police a complaint of trespass against a caste Hindu, following a dispute between them over a piece of land. Sankan had to suffer many atrocities during his five-year-long struggle against his [high] caste-Hindu landlord to get possession of the land. In his complaint, Sankan stated that the landlord had collected nearly Rs 1 lakh over a period of 15 years through deductions from his wages, as the price of the land.
>
> An equally horrifying incident occurred at Thinniyam village in Tiruchi district on May 22. Two Dalits, Murugesan and Ramasami, were forced 'to feed each other' human excreta. The 'crime' they committed was that they stood by another Dalit, Karuppiah, who was engaged in a prolonged struggle against a former panchayat president and her husband to recover an amount of money he said he had given them as bribe to get a house allotted for his sister.[38]

Shockingly, the state of Tamil Nadu under the chief ministership of Jayalalithaa, instead of taking effective remedial actions against these atrocities went ahead to promulgate on 5 October 2002, 'The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance' in order to further appease the Hindutva lobby in the country. The RSS,

the BJP and the VHP were quick to welcome this ordinance and demanded similar law throughout the country. This is the typical Hindutva response to mounting atrocities on Dalits. If Dr. Ambedkar was alive today he would have been surely debarred from converting to Buddhism! The decision that Jayalalithaa's party will contest 2004 parliamentary elections as part of the RSS/BJP alliance has once again proved the ideological affinity between the two.

Rajasthan represents the same scenario. With the ascendancy of forces of Hindutva there is a simultaneous upsurge in crimes against Dalits. Chakwara, a village near Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan has come to symbolize all that is happening against Dalits in Rajasthan. It is to be rememberd here that the BJP/RSS had been paying special attention to Rajasthan as elections for the State Assembly were due at the end of 2003, which they subsequently won. According to newspaper reports, 'the problem started an year ago in Chakawara, a Brahmin-Jat dominated village. On 14 December, Mr. Babu Lal, who is from Bairwa community (cobbler by caste), dared to bathe in a ghat meant for upper caste people in the village pond. The informal Panchayat of upper caste people fined him Rs. 51,000. When Mr. Lal refused to pay, it announced that he and members of his community would be boycotted.'[39] When Dalits decided to take a peaceful march to the 'forbidden' pond, 'around 5000 people from the upper castes from neighbouring villages streamed into Phagi town in buses and on foot in what was clearly an organized anti-Dalit movement. Armed with lathis and stone slings, they stationed themselves on the rooftops and streets here ready to confront the nearly 3000 Dalits (mostly women) who had marched till Madhorajpura, 14 km away.'[40]

According to well-known columnist, Praful Bidwai,[41] 'The immediate divisive issue in Chakwara goes beyond politics and local power equations. It involves access to the common village pond, where stepped ghats have been built and maintained over the years with state funds and contributions raised by the entire village, including the Dalits. But the Dalits have been barred from using the common ghats for decades. Caste-based "purity" demands they be treated lower than the buffaloes, cows and pigs which have virtually unrestrained access to the pond. The only exception is women who too, irrespective of caste, have always been excluded.'

Praful rightly concluded: 'This violence has a well-defined purpose: to keep the lowly in their place, the Hindu hierarchy secure, and conditions for rapacious economic and social exploitation intact. Crucial to legitimizing the violence is casteist Hinduism and obscurantist myth-making. The force of Hindutva tends to overpower even the Congress, certainly the party's local MLA, himself a Dalit. It is impossible even to imagine liberty, human agency, development or social progress until Dalit oppression is combated. Chakwara was mentioned by Ambedkar way back in the 1930s. The Bairwas then defied the savarnas by making desi ghee—a "privilege" denied to them. Caste-Hindus retaliated by pouring dirt into the ghee.

Praful points out 'the Bairwas have asserted themselves again, after decades, with greater resources: most men are literate and no longer submissive. They have the law explicitly on their side. But so long as the law's guardians, driven by *parampara*-based obscurantism, continue to make a travesty of it, the Dalits' struggle for elementary human dignity will face heavy odds.'

The Chakwara incident also represents the true brahminical face of Hindutva which only wants to use Dalits against minorities without bothering to care about their human rights which are threatened by Hindus themselves. Praful goes on to tell us about the 'painful disillusionment of people like Hari Shankar Bairwa, a politics-savvy village elder, president of the local Ambedkar Janakalyan Parishad, and once-proud member of the VHP, who even went to Ayodhya as a kar sevak with two other Dalits from Chakwara. (Bairwa has preserved the receipt for a recent Rs. 20 donation to an Ashok Singhal felicitation fund.) 'He now accuses the VHP-BJP of having cynically "used" the Dalits with the high-sounding slogan of "Hindu unity" only to betray that idea and contemptuously tell them they should observe *maryada* (prescribed quasi-sacred norms) and *parampara* (tradition), that is, deferenceto rank casteism. So much for 'unity'!'

It has also been observed, generally, that with the ascendancy of the Hindu Right to power at the national level in India there also has been a spurt in communal violence along with caste related violence. In fact, persecution in the name of caste and communal violence may not be two different things for the Hindu Right. If Dalits are targeted for the sins of being of low birth so are minorities like Muslims and

Christians, which, as mentioned earlier, mainly come from Dalit/ untouchable stock. All those who value the Dalit cause must keep in mind that the Hindu Right's dream of recreating the 'golden past' is fraught with terrible dangers. Whatever it may be saying about Muslims and Christians as dangerous minorities, it is indeed attempting with all its might to deprive Dalits of all their human rights. The blatant commitment of the Hindutva rulers to scriptures like *Manusmriti* only underline the fact that their real targets are Dalits.

Notes

1. Cited in *The Times of India*, 27 January 2004.
2. The RSS claim that beef eating started with the arrival of the Muslims in India is not even in keeping with the Vedic version of history. Undeniably, the poor cow has become another tool in their hands for communal mobilization. This is being done in complete disregard of the historical facts and findings of the Hindu religious leaders like Swami Vivekananda who is otherwise publicly revered by them. Vivekananda while speaking on the theme of the 'Buddhistic India' at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, on 2 February 1900 said: 'You will be astonished if I tell you that, according to the old ceremonials, he is not a good Hindu who does not eat beef. On certain occasions he must sacrifice a bull and eat it.' Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol 3 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, rpt 1997): 536. Other research works sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission, the latter established by Vivekananda himself, corroborate this. C. Kunhan Raja an authority on Vedic India did not miss the fact of widespread beef eating in the ancient India. 'The Vedic Aryans, including the Brahmanas, ate fish, meat and even beef. A distinguished guest was honoured with beef served at a meal. Although the Vedic Aryans ate beef, milch cows were not killed. One of the words that designated cow was *aghnya* (what shall not be killed). But a guest was a *goghna* (one for whom a cow is killed). It is only bulls, barren cows and calves that were killed'; see C. Kunhan Raja, 'Vedic Culture', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, edited by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and others, vol 1 (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1937; rpt 1997): 217. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar produced documentary facts from the Vedic scriptures to establish that Aryans ate beef. See his scholarly work 'Did the Hindus never eat beef?' in *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* (first ed. 1948) (*Dr. Babasaheb*

Ambedkar Writings and Speeches), vol. 7 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1990: 323-328.

3. The *Indian National Herald,* 31 December 1927 in *Source Material on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Movement of Untouchables,* vol. 1 (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 1982):17-18.
4. For more details on Manu and Casteism, see Ali Anwar, *Masaawaat ki Jang* (Hindi) (Delji: Vaani Prakashan, 2001).
5. All laws are the verbatim reproduction from F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Laws of Manu* (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1996). This edition is the reproduction of the first edition published in 1886. The bracket after every code carries chapter number and code number respectively. For instance (I/31) means code number 31 of chapter I of *Manusmriti.*
6. V. D. Savarkar, 'Women in *Manusmriti*'. In *Savarkar Samaga* (a collection of Savarkar's writings in Hindi), vol 4, edited by Nishikant M. and others (Delhi: Prabhat, 2000): 415.
7. *The Organizer*, 6 February 1950 p. 7.
8. Anthony Elenjimittam, *Philosophy and Action of the RSS for the Hind Swaraj* (Mumbai: Laxmi 1951): 45.
9. H. V. Seshadri, ed., *Dr. Hedgewar: The Epoch-Maker—A Biography* (Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1981): 2.
10. Ibid: 106.
11. H. V. Pingle, ed., *Smritika-Param Pujya Dr. Hedgewar Ke Jeewan Kee Vibhinn Ghatanaon Ka Sankalan* (A collection of incidents in the life of Dr. Hedgewar) (Nagpur: RSS Prakashan Vibhag, 1962): 49-50.
12. Ibid: 50.
13. Ibid: 66-67.
14. Ibid: 119.
15. V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan, 1989): 27.
16. Ibid.
17. One who does not speak Sanskrit language/non-Aryan/evil-doer/low-born according to *Brahat Hindi Kosh* edited by Kalika Prasad and others (Varanasi: Gyan Mandal, 1980): 922.
18. Savarkar, *Hindutva*: 39.
19. Ibid: 85-86.
20. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1984): 266-267.
21. V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva Ke Paanch Pran* (Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 1996): 45.
22. Ibid; indeed the same worry can be seen recurring in the thought of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, another contemporary of Savarkar and great

luminary of the Hindutva cause. That Hindus badly need the physical power of the lower castes was stressed in the following speech of his: 'Let it be remembered that persons belonging to the so-called lower castes are often the source of indomitable strength and courage among the Hindus. It is amongst them more than the others that Hinduism burns in an atmosphere of unselfish devotion and piety and to allow them to be weakened either socially or economically is to strike at the very root of Hindu consolidation in India.' Cited in H. D. Sharma, *100 Best Pre-Independence Speeches 1870-1947* (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1998): 343.

23. Gowalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939): 36.
24. Ibid: 61-62.
25. Ibid: 62.
26. Ibid: 63-64.
27. Cited in N. L. Gupta, *RSS and Democracy* (Delhi: Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, nd): 17.
28. Ibid.
29. M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu, 1996): 363.
30. Ibid: 356.
31. *The Organiser*, 26 January 1962.
32. Balraj Madhok, a senior RSS/Jan Sangh leader who preceded Deendayal Upadhyay as president of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS), levelled serious allegations against a few of his old colleagues for conspiring to kill Upadhyay in the third part of his autobiography, *Zindagi Ka Safar –3: Deendayal Upadhyay Ki Hatya Se Indira Gandhi Ki Hatya Tak* (Journey of Life-3: From the Murder of Deendayal Upadhyay to the Murder of Indira Gandhi) (Delhi: Dinman Prakashan, 2003). He states: 'He was killed by a hired assassin. But conspirators who sponsored this killing were those self-seekers and leaders with criminal bent of mind of Sangh-Jan Sangh' (p. 22). He goes to the extent of pointing fingers towards current Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nana Deshmukh as main conspirators in the murder of Deendayal Upadhyay (p. 23).

According to Madhok, the murder of Deendayal Upadhyay was planned by those who were kept out of the leading positions of the BJS by Upadhyay as president. It is to be noted here that Upadhyay, after taking over the presidentship from Balraj Madhok in December 1967, had kept out both Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nana Deshmukh from important posts. According to Balraj, Upadhyay was murdered because, 'he was constantly ensuring that ill-reputed people should get no career

advancement so that the reputation of the organization was not tarnished. For this reason some characterless selfish people were finding him a stumbling block in their path of self-seeking fulfilment' (p. 145).

33. P. Bhishikar, *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: Ideology and Perception—Concept of the Rashtra,* vol. 5 (Delhi: Suruchi, 1991): 169.
34. *The Indian Express,* 17 October 2002.
35. *The Hindu,* 21 October 2002.
36. *The Hindustan Times* in its editorial, 'Murderers Call the Shots' 20 June 2001.
37. S. Annamalai, and S. Vijay Kumar, 'The Dalit Cup of Woe in Tamil Nadu', *The Hindu*, 29 July 2002.
38. Vishwanathan, 'Preying on Dalits', *Frontline,* 5 October 2002: 39.
39. *The Statesman,* 22 September 2002: 11.
40. *The Indian Express,* September 22, 2002.
41. Praful Bidwai, 'Dalits under Siege', *The Hindustan Times,* 4 October 2002.

2

Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order

Anand Teltumbde

Introduction

Dalits in India occupy a unique space in the Hindu social order; while their place within the societal structure ordained by Hinduism is indeterminate, they are always assumed to be a part of this structure, both in hegemonic as well as in problematic terms. The Hindu hegemony over the Dalit universe is claimed and seen in the extension of the caste system and a cultural paradigm among Dalits, whereas the problematic of Dalits arise out of the impermeable divide between the *chaturvarna* or the fourfold varna structure of Hindu society and the *avarna* Dalits, which is only bridged by the relationship of exploitation.

Hindutva, which translates as Hinduness, is still said to be different from the Hindu religion because Savarkar who coined its definition has not specified its boundaries in terms of the precepts or doctrines of Hinduism but in terms of its monolithic cultural and geographic aspects. According to his definition, a Hindu is 'a person who regards this land of Bharatavarsha, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his holy land, that is the cradle-land of his religion.' [1] His purpose was not in the least religious; it was expressly political. With the definition of Hindutva he sought to create a virtual identity that will transcend all differences within Hindu society and politically bind it into a Hindu Rashtra. As for Dalits who increasingly perceived Hinduism as a contrivance for their oppression, Hindutva sought to lure them in with a promise of this pedagogic Hindu unity. It did not mean to destroy castes but merely to assume them away.

Hindutva, whether it is Savarkar's conceptualization or the way it

has been operationalized by the Sangh Parivar, is fraught with contradictions. Savarkar's definition excludes all those non-Indians (e.g., the powerful NRIs who support it) even if they consider India as their 'holy land' and also those Indians who follow different faiths than Hinduism. While some of these religions have originated in India, some have their birthplace outside India. The former, Jainism, Buddhism, Veerashaivism and Sikhism, not to count many minor faith systems, have their historical origins and sacred sites on Indian soil. Hindutva seeks to bracket their adherents together as Hindus notwithstanding the fact that these religions and faith systems were born out of fierce contention with Hinduism and they would not like to identify with it. Besides, numerous tribal cults and 'animistic' faiths which belong to this country but do not have anything common with Hinduism were likewise included within Hinduism. Foreign religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism had to be excluded but not equally; exclusion of the Parsis is not equal to the exclusion of the Muslims, for instance. Dalits, who were ostracized by Hinduism for millennia in every possible manner and who were ghettoized so that they have a different culture[2] were included. The political expediency embedded in Hindutva easily overrides its ideological pretensions when the Sangh Parivar, its main torch bearer awkwardly spreads its net to woo the Muslims and Christians as 'Mohammedi Hindus' and 'Christi Hindus' respectively.[3] The problematic of Hindutva is thus obvious; as a concept it lacks historical and sociological validity and as a political tool, it has proved utterly unviable.

The ploy of civilizational continuum beholden to Hinduism or there being a single religious fabric shared by all is simply not tenable. The case for the indissoluble connection between Hinduism and Indian civilization made first by the Orientalist and then nationalist intellectuals was basically on two planks: one, the pervasive ideological continuity of Hinduism; and two, the pan-Indian social organization characterized by caste. It is acknowledged that Hinduism above all was the mentality associated with caste. Both these bases have been problematized by the scholars: the first on account of the historical existence of two parallel streams of ideologies: Brahminism and Shramanism right through the ancient times and their bitter struggle that survives in various forms even today;[4] and the second, on account of the fact that castes were local in character and only by putting them

into the 'Procrustean frame of varna' they could be taken as national.[5]

The attempts to construct a singular Hinduism by the Reform movements during the last two centuries, which Romila Thapar called 'syndicated Hinduism' has helped the coinage of Hindutva. The syndication process reflected a considerable amount of diversity in terms of motivation, influences, and soon, hence the resultant product was seen as different from Hinduism. Hindutva therefore is claimed to be different from Hinduism, sharing only its essence; its core beliefs, its worldview. Insofar as this essence of Hinduism is sourced from Brahminism, Hindutva or syndicated Hinduism also must carry the brahminic worldview. Thapar rightly calls the syndicated Hinduism 'a garbled form of Brahminism' with 'motley of values' from other sources, like the Bhakti movements and Puranic rituals.[6] As for Dalits, Hindutva represents just a revival of the old oppressive Brahminism albeit in a liberal garb.

Hindutva has created a political-cultural crisis for people by polarizing society into 'us' and 'them'. Currently, religious minorities, particularly the Christians and Muslims, are being stamped as 'them'. The minority communities have been shattered by their loss of faith in the innate goodness of Indians. That by itself is bad enough but the negative externality it creates for Dalits is much worse. It is bad enough to exclude certain people on the basis of race or religion but it is far worse to create false consciousness in those who in reality continue to suffer exclusion. This is precisely what Hindutva does to the Dalits. It intoxicates them to raise weapons against their class allies by depicting the latter as their 'enemy'. Dalits are thus effectively trapped between the warring communities; as a face of Hindutva to religious minorities and as lowly aliens to the caste Hindus. In the Hindutva laboratory of Gujarat, the experiments have amply demonstrated this poignant reality of Dalits. While Dalits were the only other community to have suffered seriously during these experiments, they were also exposed in the media as culprits. Muslims saw them as the 'enemy' but nothing changed for them on the Hindu side; they remained the same despicable outcastes in the Hindu societal structure.

While it is easy to expose the exploitative import of Hindutva to Dalits, the vital question is unasked: why are Dalits getting into this trap laid by their traditional enemy? Why does this phenomenon of the rise of Hindutva and of Dalits falling prey to its allurements have to

emerge at all? What is its material basis? These questions if posed elicit stereotypical explanations that are either rooted in ideological soil or simply based on some conspiracy theory. While these explanations may not be entirely invalid, they cannot be said to be adequate insofar as they ignore the relationship with the material base. In this perspective, neoliberalism that informed the economic policies of the government indirectly and directly from the mid-1980s, the period interestingly signifying the rise of Hindutva, needs to be marked out for careful study.

The relationship between Hindutva and neoliberalism is not evident; the former ostensibly is xenophobic and inward looking while the latter essentially is outward looking; the former brags about the greatness of Hindu culture and traditions, whereas the latter affirms the developmental prowess of international trade and global culture. As a result, people who suffered the devastating impact of globalization as well as the harassment of Hindutva consider them as two mutually exclusive problems. Some have felt the severity of the first compared to the second while others have felt it otherwise. This has manifested in the form of two separate sets of struggles; one against neoliberal globalization and the other for combatting the communalism of Hindutva. The empirical correlation between these two phenomena however indicates that they may not be unrelated. This essay therefore adopts the hypothesis that these two phenomena are interdependent, and attempts to explore their relationship in order to situate the Dalit problem in a proper context.

Hindutva: Changing Colours of the Chameleon

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been the ideological vehicle of Hindutva. It started as a cultural organization that repeatedly claimed not to have any truck with politics and much less with economics. Dr. K. B. Hedgewar, a Telugu Brahmin from Nagpur, a disciple of Dr. B. S. Moonje and a friend of V. D. Savarkar, who founded the RSS in 1925 had 'felt an acute need for organizing the Hindu community for reawakening'. The Hedgewar-phase revolved around laying the foundation and starting the *Shakha* (branch) training and pedagogy-based political discourses called *bouddhiks* (intellectual sessions). The constitution of the RSS claims that 'the Sangh, as such, has no

politics and is devoted to purely cultural work'. Unlike the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS remained aloof from active politics and concentrated on cadre-building for years.

The self-proclaimed apolitical character of the RSS was a deliberate subterfuge to stay away from the anti-imperialist struggle that was stirring the country and thereby not to antagonize the colonial powers. As Kanungo rightly observes its vision of a Hindu rashtra itself was a political statement.[7] This apolitical mask was however discarded soon after the takeover of the RSS by M. S. Golwalkar, the new sarsanghachalak (supreme leader) succeeding Hedgewar. The RSS articulated a discernible fascist form of politics and began practising it. As Ram Puniyani observes, 'Golwalkar . . . crystallized the Hindutva politics in very strong and blunt ways. His hatred for minorities and communists comes out transparently. His appreciation for the eternal relevance of the laws of Manu is a clear pointer to the status of Dalits and women in the RSS vision of India, which is that of a Hindu Rashtra. It was from the Golwalkar era that, rather than direct political activity, RSS emphasized the infiltration of its trained volunteers into bureaucracy, army and media.' [8]

It is well known that the RSS did not recognize the national flag, the Constitution of India, or any of the state symbols, insignia or even institutions of the Indian Republic. When the Congress at its Lahore session adopted '*purna swaraj*' and called upon people to observe independence day on 26 January 1930 by unfurling the Tricolor, Hedgewar as sarsanghachalak had issued a circular to all the RSS shakhas to worship the *bhagwa jhanda* (saffron flag).[9] Even after independence when the Tricolor became the National Flag, the RSS refused to accept it.[10] Until recently, the RSS did not unfurl the national flag in its offices. Likewise, the RSS never hid its dislike for the Constitution and wanted it to be replaced by the *Manusmriti* (see chapter 1). Golwalkar had declared, 'It [the Constitution] has absolutely nothing, which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!' [11] Democracy, socialism, secularism and federalism, which are the basic features of our Constitution, are also not acceptable to the RSS.[12]

Despite this, it did not have any qualms in aspiring for political power and actually have it within the same constitutional framework

that it despised. In October 1951, the RSS floated a full-fledged political party called Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS). It did not make much dent in politics and continued as a marginal player until the political vortex created by Jayaprakash Narayan's movement catapulted it to the mainstream. During the Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in June 1975, it took full advantage of mass sentiment and earned itself an aura of a crusader for democracy. It became a part of the post-Emergency political formation, the Janata Party, and tasted political power when the latter swept the 1977 elections and formed the government at the centre. This bonhomie however did not last long and soon after the debacle of the splintered Janata Party in the 1980-elections, the BJS elements came out of the Janata Party, taking shelter under the 'duel membership issue' and formed a new party called the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP also languished on the margins of national politics until Rajiv Gandhi with his political naiveté provided it with relevance through his liberalization policies and political space by mishandling communal issues in the Shah Bano case and opening of Ram Lulla temple at Ayodhya. The BJP used these opportunities to the hilt and soon got catapulted from the political margins to political prominence.[13] It did not take much time thereafter to reach the seat of power. The BJP carved out a formidable coalition of political parties and formed governments at the Centre in 1996 (for 13 days), in 1998 (for 13 months) and in 1999 (lasting a full term). Though they were voted out of power in the 2004 elections, no one can belittle their political existence and power. As Kanungo writes, 'Converting India into a Hindu Rashtra may remain a distant dream. But there is no doubt that the politics and ideology of the RSS is spreading at a faster pace, incorporating new social groups and regions.'[14]

It is difficult to discern the economic vision of the RSS, particularly during its Hedgewar phase. It appears rather disinterested in the material things represented by economics. Even after Dr. Hedgewar's tenure, among the myriad changes that befell the RSS, none significantly related to the economic sphere. It could not articulate an alternate economic vision for its Hindu Rashtra. As Malik writes, 'Under the stewardship of Golwalkar from 1940 to 1973, the RSS saw itself as a sort of Hinduized social service league. It concentrated on issues such as rural development and uplift of aboriginal tribal people. If it had an eco-

nomic view at all, it was fairly similar to Mahatma Gandhi's cottage industry doctrine. This involved the idea of the self-sufficient village, one that met its own needs and did not need to look to the world beyond. In essence, it was an anti-free trade argument, albeit in an inchoate form.'[15] But in the wake of globalization, it floated an outfit called Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) to monitor the economic policy of the government.[16] With its name itself, it created an impression of active opposition to the policies of globalization. Its critique of the government policy continued through the entire decade even after the BJP came to power.

The SJM indeed represented the contradiction the BJP faced between its imperatives of a 'strong India' rhetoric represented by the forces of modernization and globalization and the metaphors of purity and pollution represented by the *swadeshi* ideology of the RSS. The fear of losing its political base in view of the middle class increasingly favouring globalization, the triumph of capitalism trumpeted in the fall of the erstwhile Soviet block, and the opportunity to be an ally of the USA, overcame the ambivalence in economic sphere and made the BJP an aggressive implementer of neoliberal globalization.[17] SJM indeed made considerable noise in critiquing the BJP government's every economic policy[18] during its second spell and impressed people by the show of democracy within the Sangh Parivar but when the BJP formed the NDA government in 1999 on a much stable footing and launched its globalization drive with a renewed zeal, the SJM criticism became slowly subdued. While it continued its criticism of the privatization programme led by Arun Shourie, its voice was so subdued that it was barely heard.

Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Order and Fascism

Neoliberalism

According to Bourdieu, neoliberalism is a political project for the reconstruction of society in accord with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism.[19] At the theoretical level it may be defined as an intellectual hodgepodge devised in defence of capitalism and against the collectivist theories of Marxism–Leninism. It is pivoted on the autonomy of an individual, the tenet it picked up from classical liber-

alism. In contrast to the Marxist vision of communism, this tenet is extended to its extremist form by undermining and subordinating every kind of collectiveness and age-old structures of human values. The individual is reduced to *homo economicus* based on the belief that the pursuit of material self-gain is the 'natural' drive of human beings.[20] Human progress is conceived as the result of competition between these autonomous individuals and hence they should be rendered free, absolutely unfettered to carry on with their enterprise in what is called the 'free market'. Privatization, deregulation, decentralization, and the minimalist state, which have been identified as the other characteristics of neoliberalism are but the corollaries of these basic tenets.[21]

Neoliberalism, claimed the legacy of classical liberalism; the prefix 'neo' referring to the new contexts and content. This new context was the ever-deepening crisis of capitalism and hence the new content reflected more vehement and doctrinaire attitude of its tenets. Classical liberalism of the likes of John Locke and Adam Smith reflected a holistic concern; because the task before them was to provide an ideological base to support the emerging capitalist system. Neoliberalism on the contrary had begun with a defensive agenda for saving the capitalist system and did not need similar concerns. The decline of Keynesianism by the mid-1960s, and the series of crises capitalism had to face thereafter with increased frequency created an urgent need for it. Its inherent weakness however manifested into its offensive posture. It is symbolic that it came to be known to the world in the backdrop of intrigues and bloodshed in Chile.[22]

The growing mismatch between crises and possible response further hardened the attitude of the neoliberal creed. It devised and upheld unbridled Social Darwinism, which does not have any consideration for people who are weak, poor and powerless. It does not have any place for 'incompetent' people. Neoliberalism's definition of incompetence, of course, relates not with any productive domain but with the domain of market exchange. It upholds the liberty of enterprising individuals but condemns equality as unnatural. All its patron saints, right from Ludwig von Mises to Friedrich Hayek to Milton Friedman are vehement in claiming inequality as the catalyst for human progress.[23] They condemned the struggles for equality as ill-advised and rather advocated struggles against it as inequality alone brought humans progress. Fraternity, being a moralistic value based

on compassion, which neoliberalism rejects outright as unnatural, was not considered even worth talking about. Of course, there cannot be any fraternity among the perpetually combatting unequal individuals!

Neoliberal Order

Neoliberal order refers to a form of imperialism that ordains a specific power configuration within capitalism that promises to restore the power and income of the upper fractions of ruling classes who suffered decline on account of capitalist crises.[24] The capitalist system has inherent contradictions, which keep manifesting into crises. There have been many minor and major crises in the short history of capitalism. The two great structural crises of capitalism during the last two centuries brought about cataclysmic changes: the first (post-1870s) crisis had accelerated inter-imperialist rivalry and led to World War I and a revolution in Russia, while the second crisis (the Great Depression) actually reversed capitalism's internationalizing trajectory and led to World War II.[25] The post-World War II order created under the aegis of the American state that emerged supreme after the war, sought to revive capitalist globalization using the Bretton Wood infrastructure. It achieved considerable success during the reconstruction phase but plunged into another deep economic crisis of 1970. This crisis, unlike the earlier ones, led to deepening and acceleration of capitalist globalization with the adoption of neoliberalism and inaugurated what is called a neoliberal world order. This order marked an end of seven-decades long Cold War and created what is called a post-Cold War or a unipolar world.

This unipolar world order can be conceived as a pyramidal structure, the USA being at the apex and other powers with respective spheres of geopolitical influence constituting the second and third layers. The next layer is comprised by the major regional powers that however cannot extend their influence globally. They include Russia in Eurasia, France and Germany in Europe, China in East Asia, India in South Asia, Iran in South-West Asia, Brazil in Latin America and South Africa and Nigeria in Africa.[26] There are secondary powers in each region in conflict with these major states that play the role of geopolitical pivots:[27] for example, Britain in relation to Germany-French, Pakistan in relation to India, and so on.[28] The USA has necessarily to

deal with these powers either by aligning them around its interests or by creating geopolitical counters in key regions. The most basic geopolitical aims of the USA can be identified as controlling Eurasia as well as the energy resources in the Middle East and Central Asia; containing China; and suppressing the rise of local powers in regional subsystems, especially if they are hostile to American interests.

Here comes the importance of India. As India straddles the geographic arc from Central Asia to the Straits of Malacca, essential for containing China, it becomes imperative to integrate India into the USA's strategic grand design. In addition, India, given its cultural contention with Islam and historical contention with Pakistan, serves as a counter against both the Islamic threat emerging from the oil-rich Asian region as well as Pakistan making extravagant demands for her services as it did at the time of the US 'War on Terrorism'. Recognizing these facts the integration of the Indian state and its military power into the global military strategy of US Imperialism thus becomes imperative in the latter's' strategic shift to Central Asia and China.

Besides political considerations, the economic interests of US multinationals in South Asia have also significantly influenced the USA's shift towards India. The importance of these interests has always ranked on par with that of US security; the National Economic Council and the National Security Council being the parallel apex bodies. India's sheer size, its vast market with an expanding base of middle class consumers, industrial infrastructure and huge English speaking technical manpower, spelt tremendous business opportunities to US multinationals and thus ensured its primacy in US foreign policy. The economic and strategic potential of India's IT industry and its dovetailing with US businesses also came as an added boon.[29]

Another dimension of the Hindutva politics extends to the Indian Diaspora in the USA, the influence of which has been significant in not only supporting Hindutva's campaign within India but also in shaping its ties with American imperialism. The Indian-American community, largely having the upper caste-upper class background naturally subscribe to the Hindutva ideology and with their prosperity abroad, in their quest of identity, they tend to see the possibility of reviving India's 'past glory'. It has actively contributed huge funds to the Hindu fundamentalist organizations and has built a formidable network in the international arena.[30] The community, through the Congressional

caucus on India and Indian Americans, which is one of the biggest interest groups in the House of Representatives, lobbied effectively on many issues including removal of sanctions against India following its nuclear tests in 1998.[31] The Diaspora surely represents the best evangelism for neoliberalism.

The political ascendance of the Hindutva forces at the time of this strategic shift of the USA may well be both cause and effect. Two factors helped this ascendance: one, the internal political dynamics unleashed by the material crisis, accentuated by the adoption of neoliberal economic policies, and two, the external assistance by the Diaspora and preference of the American Empire. The Hindutva forces with their anti-communism, anti-Islam, elitist orientation and pro-American track record come clearly as a preferred partner of the USA in relation to the vacillating alternative among the ruling class parties in the form of the Congress Party.

Fascism

Paradoxically, the neoliberal order cannot be sustained without a centralized power. As free markets need a regulator to maintain their freedom, so does the neoliberal world order need military might to maintain it. Neoliberalism thus craves for its apparent opposite, Fascism, for its spread as well as sustenance. Fascism in terms of its basic tenets appears opposed to neoliberalism. Whereas the latter swears by individual autonomy, the former rejects it and makes individuals subordinate to a corporate state. This contention of Fascism, however, needs to be read together with its glorification of the leader, endowed with superhuman powers far distinct from the ordinary person. In its formulation, all theoretical considerations are subservient to the 'inexorable dynamics' of the factual situation, which only the leader masters; it is he who knows that the 'iron logic of nature' will make the strong prevail over the weak.[32] The unchallenged centre of power that Fascism creates is what the neoliberal order also wants to stave off the possible free enterprise of the masses of victims against those of a few capitalist entrepreneurs.

Thus at one level, though enunciated in contrary language, neoliberalism becomes a complementary creed to Fascism; the former needing the latter. In contrast to Marxism, which asserts a rational

logic of history that it will bring about final triumph of the weak in an act of universal salvation, there is no fulfilment of history in Fascism. Instead, all history is incessant struggle, and the struggle itself is welcomed for its own ethical value, accelerating technological evolution and making technology—not class struggle—as the pragmatic motor for social development. For war and technical expansion alone, as it contends, brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it. Fascism carries this anti-pacifist struggle into the lives of individuals. It is not essentially different from the neoliberal dictum of competition that impels individuals into incessant struggle against everybody else in the world.

In order to carry out its writ of ultra-freedom, neoliberalism needs the power of Fascism. Although couched in different languages, neoliberalism and Fascism are complementary to each other; the former needing the latter for its actual realization and the latter leading to the former as its fruition. In India, neoliberalism has found its wonderful ally in fascist Hindutva.

Fascist Hindutva and Dalits

There can be a reasonable debate over whether the paradigm created by the political ascendance of the Hindutva forces could be called fascist. In absence of an established theory of Fascism, two approaches, Marxist and non-Marxist, are generally considered to assess whether any movement or state is fascist. The major difference between these approaches is in terms of their focus; while the Marxist approach has a focus on the characteristics of the fascist state, Fascism in its matured form, the non-Marxist approach has focused on movements; they are much more strongly pivoted on the elucidation of Fascism's distinctive ideological themes and organizational principles.[33] Apart from its insistence that Fascism can only arise in specific conditions (extreme stage of capitalism in decay),[34] Marxist approaches consider ascension of fascist forces to full state power represents the culmination of the logic of Fascism. It naturally makes it difficult to see Fascism in a country like India when the BJP-like party rules at the Centre without obliterating democratic spaces. Thus they would be inclined to call the forces of Hindu communalism as authoritarian, reactionary and anti-

secular, and even as potentially fascist, but not as fascist already.[35]

However, if the constraints on the BJP in power are taken into account, the movement-centric approach may appear more appropriate to assess the fascist character of the Hindutva forces. A movement can be better assessed through its aspirations, ideology rather than its practice because the latter necessarily involves compromises. With such insights, we can use a framework[36] that outlines certain 'fascsist minimum' to assess the character of the Hindutva forces. Vanaik used one such framework based on a three-part model by Stanley Payne, which comprises *(a)* fascist negations (anti-liberalism, anti-democracy and anti-Communism); *(b)* generic ideological motifs and goals (state as an 'absolute', expansionist foreign policy, subsuming individual autonomy, some collective 'Other' as the enemy, extreme authoritarian nationalism, an apocalyptic perception of deep 'civilizational crisis'; *(c)* special and common features of style and organization (charismatic leadership, exaltation of youth and youthfulness of fascist leaders, violence is glorified, mass emotions through evocative symbols, and masculinity). While on each of these criteria Hindutva can be easily seen to score quite highly, its fascist proclivities come out more clearly in its genesis and growth.

Indeed, Hindutva's fascist proclivities are seen right at its birth. After the fall of the Peshwas, the Brahmin rulers of Pune, the entire Brahmin establishment in Maharashtra, was anxious to regain its lost rule. The spurt of rebellions by Pune Brahmins against the British can be easily traced to this motive. Although they were glorified as the anti-colonial revolutionary struggles by their caste, their content could only be classed as conservative. History shows that the Brahmins from Pune and later of all Maharashtra were in search of an example of conservative revolution. They got it in the form of Fascism which developed in Italy. The glee with which they received it was expressed fulsomely in the Marathi press during 1930s and 1940s, which was totally in their control.[37]

Generally, the origin of Hindutva is credited to Savarkar, who had provided its definition in 1923[38] but at a conceptual level it goes back to Lokmanya Tilak,[39] who not only saw the potential of religious ideology in political mobilization for the first time but effectuated it by starting public celebrations of Ganeshotsava and birth anniversaries of Shivaji as the protector of cows and Brahmins. The basic reason was

to win back the celebration-loving masses of lower castes that had drifted to observe Islamic festivals under the Sufi influence. Tilak had also propounded the intellectually juvenile 'Aryan theory of race' that claimed a white racial stock for the upper caste Indians and accepted the Vedas as their core literature, an illusion shared by many upper caste people those days. Essentially, Tilak thus represented the contemporary Chitpavan struggle to revive the lost glory of Brahminism that had nothing for the lower castes other than their assigned caste rungs. From 1924 to 1935 *Kesari,* Tilak's paper, regularly published editorials and articles about Italy, Fascism and Mussolini. It described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to an orderly situation, where social struggles had no more reason to exist.

As Marzia Casolari tells us, 'by the late 1920s, the fascist regime and Mussolini had considerable popularity in Maharashtra. The aspect of Fascism which appealed most to Hindu nationalists were, of course, both the militarisation of society and what was seen as real transformation of society, exemplified by the shift from chaos to order. The anti-democratic system was considered as a positive alternative to democracy which was seen as a typically British value.'[40]

The first Hindu nationalist who came in contact with the fascist regime and its dictator was B. S. Moonje. He had specially visited Italy to study Fascism and had a personal audience with Mussolini. His exalted impressions of this meeting are well documented in his diary. He is on record stating that 'every aspiring and growing nation needs such [fascist] organisations'. He played a great role in moulding the RSS into a nationwide fascist organization.

V. D. Savarkar, a father figure of aggressive Hindutva, was also inspired by Italian Fascism. His secret society 'Abhinav Bharat', which he founded in 1904 was just an Indianization of 'Young Italy' of Giuseppe Mazzini,[41] who is credited with a fascist idea of the 'unity of thought and action'. He also had a great liking for Hitler's Nazism and the Fascism of Mussolini. He had chided Nehru for opposing them in India and openly endorsed them before and during World War II. M. S. Golwalkar is also well known to be a Hitler-fan and does not require elaboration. He often eulogized the Hitlerite model of racial cleansing and even adopted it as his own. He unhesitatingly wanted to model his Hindu Rashtra on Hitler's totalitarian and fascist pattern.

His book *We or Our Nationhood Defined* [42] is replete with idealization of the Nazi cultural nationalism (the phrase being used lately to describe the strategy of the BJP) of Hitler. Savarkar had supported Hitler's anti–Jewish pogroms and almost hinted at a solution for the Muslim problem in India when he said: 'A Nation is formed by a majority living there-in . . . They [Jews] being in minority were driven out from Germany'.[43] The Sangh Parivar's slogan 'one nation, one culture, one religion, one language', clearly resonates the Nazi slogan 'Ein volk, ein Reich, ein Fuehrer' (one people, one State, one leader).

After independence, the RSS spread its tentacles through a host of mass organizations and created a Sangh Parivar that variously followed the fascist dictums in its virulent anti-communism, organized terror against 'internal enemies' (minorities in India in place of Jews in Germany), rumour-mongering and whipping up mass frenzy. The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar is also manifest in its revivalism (revival of Vedic glory like fascist revival of the ancient traditions of the race of imperial Rome, of 'Aryan pride'), absolute statism, expansionist foreign policy (Akhand Bharat that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan and entire South Asia and perhaps beyond). As the Nazi slogan provided motivation for the most inhuman forms of destruction, the Hindutva slogan has already succeeded in symbolically incapacitating the Indian state when it demolished the Babri Masjid and enacted an unprecedented carnage of Muslims in Gujarat. As in fascist Germany, the Sangh Pariwar has effectively created a 'we-ness' identity, based on Hindu tradition and rituals and in corollary created the 'other' apparently comprising Muslims, Christians, communists and those who are in disagreement with them like Ambedkarite Dalits.

Couched in a progressive idiom, Hindutva, of late, is presented as a sans caste construct to attract Dalits who have always wanted a Hindu society without castes. After all, every anti-caste movement, including one led by Dr. Ambedkar, initially aspired for this modest reform in Hindu society. It is only when they realized that castes were an inalienable part of Hinduism and hence abolition of castes was not possible within its framework, did they tend to distance themselves from the Hindu fold. Therefore when Hindutva creates an illusion of abolition of castes, it becomes an attractive proposition for the majority of Dalits who are not well versed, either with their own history or the dubious character of the Hindutva forces. If one looks beyond the dust storm

raised with the assimilation slogans by the Hindutva forces, one can easily see the fact that Hindutva is never for the annihilation of castes aspired by Dalits.

What Hindutva abolishes is what is already abolished. The abominable practice of Untouchability that Hindutva shouts against is already done away with in the law. This trick of playing up Untouchability in place of caste is the old one; every committed Hindu from Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi wanted Untouchability to be abolished but at the same time struggled to justify the caste system. Hindutva does not transcend this orthodox Hindu stand. When it talks about caste, it is never unequivocal; it never reflects the gravity of the vexatious problem that caste is. Castes become a virtual reality for Hindutva. They just need to be assumed away and do not need to be struggled against! Hindutva therefore does not need to understand them, does not need to see material contradictions underneath them, does not require any programme on the ground to fight them, and does not believe in annihilating them. By implication, all the anti-caste movements in history down to those of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar are considered as misconceived and are made redundant. If castes could be cast away simply by wishing for it then why does one need to wage battles against them! Paradoxically, the trap is embellished with a high pitched rhetoric of adulation to the icons of Dalits such as Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar and also with the allure of Sanskritization and even some material benefit to the Dalits.

There is no doubt that many Dalits are falling prey to Hindutva's misrepresentations. Initially, it was the upwardly mobile Dalits that the Hindutva forces targeted in their cooptation strategy launched with the platforms like *Samajik Samarasata Manch* but these days, they are aiming at the Dalit masses. The reported participation of Dalits on the side of Hindutva in the pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 testifies to the success of this strategy. Certain sections (castes) of Dalits, which did not identify with the majority Dalit castes that spearheaded anti-caste struggles, were already lured away by the Hindutva forces. For instance, Bal Thackeray is known to publicly differentiate between Dalits as Naubauddhas (Ambedkarites) and others who have significantly populated his Shiv Sena. Though not so loud and exhibitive, it is largely the story of other Hindutva organizations too. Contrary to the expectations of many analysts, of late Hindutva ap-

pears to be making inroads into the bastion of Ambedkarite Dalits as symbolized by the recent Bhimshakti-Shivshakti syndrome in Maharashtra (see chapter 10).

Hindutva and Neoliberalism: Strange Affinity

During the past two decades of globalization, the trend of religious fundamentalism, obscurantism, right reaction, and so on, is clearly seen to be growing all over the world. This trend may be attributable to two types of factors: intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic factors refer to the internal drive of neoliberalism that creates situations which in turn give rise to certain kinds of cultural patterns and ideological trends in society. The extrinsic factors refer to the cultural and ideological forces inherent in certain societies that with support from neoliberalism reach resonant levels of these patterns. Looking at the euphoric welcome that neoliberal globalization received form the elite castes and classes in India, within as well as abroad, one tends to see India as possessing both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors. Since Hindutva is the cultural and ideological expression of the elite castes and classes, its inherent congruence with neoliberalism can be easily hypothesized for explaining the special affinity between them.

It may sound weird and little anachronistic to see the ideological essence of neoliberalism entrenched in the core of Hinduism. The ideological essence of Hinduism is predicated on individual and not the collective. The self-regulating exploitative social (caste) structure ordained by it is also based on an individual internalization of the logic that one has to observe one's jati dharma in the hope of earning merit so as to deserve better state in the next birth. Savarkar, the official progenitor of Hindutva, defines it in relation to the consciousness of India as *Pitru Bhumi* and *Punya Bhumi*. It is only an individual who can have this internalization, a consciousness of Hindutva. The Hindutva discourse of cultural nationalism that rings familiar with Fascism is also based on the individualism that provides a discursive bridge between universalism and particularism which Hindutva aspires for. While the Sangh Parivar shows itself to be against the West for its individualism, its critique, if at all, could be construed as the assertion that it is a social evil which leads to alienation, family and community breakdown. If one takes a closer look at their historical narrative, social theories and

proposed policies one finds that they are all predicated on the existence of autonomous individuals:

> Individualism also reveals itself in the common theme that a nation's upliftment is tied to the masculinity of the people. In keeping with the RSS tradition, Dattopant Thengadi, one of the Sangh stalwarts, links national progress with the transformation of the character of every man, on an individual basis. The assumption is that if each man takes on these masculine characteristics, the nation as the sum total of these men will also become 'manly'. It is in this relationship between individuals and groups that nationalism becomes possible. The 'collective' is seen as a conglomeration of individuals. Each distinct, discontinuous person has the qualities of the nation within him. This is the discursive space for transferring the discourse of the self from the individual to the group. Once the group is equated with its constituent members it is possible to conceive of each individual as a mini-nation, and each nation a macro-individual. The character of the nation is the character of the individual and vice versa; the religion of an individual becomes the religion of the nation and vice versa. It is thus that Hindutva can make universal claims to modern science and reason while claiming Hindu nationalism as the universal for all of India.[44]

Once seen that individualism is the basic unit of Hinduism, it may not be difficult to establish the attitude of Hindutva towards competition. For, to some extent competition can be seen as a corollary of individualism. Hinduism is ostensibly based on the ethos of competition: competition in masculine valour, competition in feminine sexuality, competition with and within castes, and so on. It is reflected in the unique feature of Hinduism whose gods are always armed with bloody weapons. The underscoring point is that the victors are always worshipped. Hindu mythology is replete with stories celebrating the competitiveness of a person from childhood to death. A human being does not have any inherent value; he or she has to establish it in competition. The caste in that sense is nothing but the representative of one's competitive status; the Brahmin being the most competitive and the

Dalits its opposite. One may argue that caste creates barriers to open competition, but then it is also the case with neoliberalism that swears by unbridled competition; does not the endowment of a person create a barrier in open competition? The market can well be analogized with the battleground that is so glorified in Hinduism.

Similarities between neoliberalism and Hinduism can be seen even beyond the conceptual realm. For instance, as discussed earlier, both neoliberalism and Hinduism are not interested in equality. In fact both consider inequality as natural, the catalyst of human progress. As regards liberty, neoliberalism appears to swear by individual liberty whereas Hinduism on the face of it seems to constrain it with caste confines. But it is not true. Both neoliberalism as well as Hinduism do have similar measures of liberty but is meant only for a select few. The liberty in neoliberalism is a commodity that you buy with money. You are at liberty to do anything provided you pay price. If you do not have money, you do not have liberty; you do not exist. Thus the liberty of neoliberalism is not its intrinsic value; its intrinsic value lies in money. It grants you liberty in proportion to the money in your wallet. Hinduism is not known to have liberty; but again it is not true. It gives enough liberty to the people of *dwija* or twice born (the second time being the sacred thread investiture for males) varna, that is, Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. The lower Shudra varna which is supposed to serve the dwija varna with its labour does not have it. The amount of liberty it grants to people is according to the placement of their varna in the varna hierarchy. Even the Shudras, who seemingly did not have liberty, could claim liberty in relation to the avarna people. When varnas evolved into castes and lost their strict significance, liberty could be purchased. With regard to fraternity, both neoliberalism and Hinduism do not seem to care for it. Fraternity cannot be a value to neoliberalism that privileges unbridled competition between people and likewise it cannot be a value to Hinduism which ordains brutalization through caste. In this way, we can observe the striking similarities between neoliberalism and Hinduism on possibly any and every parameter. This astounding ideological affinity between the two accentuates the existential orientation of people towards the occult of Hindutva and Social Darwinism.

Dalits under Hindutva-Neoliberal order

The impact of neoliberal globalization on Dalits can be assessed with a heuristic: the adverse impact of globalization shall be inversely proportional to one's standing in the socioeconomic scale.[45] Dalits being the lowest in the scale, they shall be most badly hit. Empirically also it has been established that globalization had a calamitous impact on Dalits.[46] The basic premise of neoliberal globalization that it entails economic growth has not come true. If it were true, globalization envisaged that the economic growth would trickle down to the lowest strata and thus benefit everyone, albeit in differential terms. The dictum of political economy can tell us that growth in economy does not necessarily trickle down to the poor but the entire burden of its decline is essentially borne by them. Thus decline in the global economy during the globalization era has certainly impoverished poor people of the world. The statistics on galloping inequality in the context of declining economy indicates that rich are getting richer at the cost of poor. Dalits in India being at the bottom layer of the social scale have been its biggest victims.

While the adverse impact of globalization on the poor has become an established fact, its impact on people like Dalits who bear the burden of social oppression is not as widely acknowledged. This sphere of exploitation of Dalits is duly noted in the Constitution. It provides them certain safeguards like reservations in educational institutions, employment in the government and the public sector and certain other measures to restrain the exercise of social prejudice against them. This constitutional space also has been either significantly eroded or rendered meaningless under globalization. The rampant commercialization of education is slowly barricading the Dalits from the field of education. The tremendous growth of a class-orientated schooling system, all pervading expensive coaching classes, increasing numbers of competitive examinations and expensive inputs, therefore, increasing corporatization of the training in frontier areas (NIIT, Aptech for IT), growing numbers of private colleges, deemed universities, new generation of foreign-affiliated institutions are directly attributable to the globalization paradigm and are having debilitating effect on the educa-

tional prospects of Dalits. General decline in developmental expenditure due to fiscal deficit fundamentalism, the drive towards privatization of the public sector and the ethos of global competitiveness have practically rendered provisions of reservations for Dalits meaningless. The loss of hope of getting jobs is further dissuading Dalits from investing in education, setting into motion a vicious cycle towards the ruination of Dalits. Globalization has reversed the declining trend of school drop out of Dalit students over the last four decades and has created an alarming situation where Dalit students feel hopeless and are getting out of schools.

Globalization, beyond the existential imperatives, has eliminated the hope of Dalit emancipation. Education, land reform, democracy and modernity, the four parameters that can be considered as the best proxy for their four empowerments of personal, socioeconomic, socio-political, and socio-cultural respectively, which collectively map Dalit emancipation, are all getting obliterated under the impact of globalization. Education, as just discussed, is becoming the exclusive preserve of the rich and traditional elites as it was for millennia under Manu's Code. Land Reforms, that was spoken by one and all as the key to the caste question, at least the economic aspects of it, is totally eclipsed and in its place corporatization of farms is being inaugurated to integrate India into world agro markets. Democracy, as the enabler of dissent, agitations, struggle and thereby a hope for change, is also getting fast eroded under the onslaught of neoliberal globalization, which is essentially anti-democracy. Contrary to some expectations that globalization will entail modernization in countries like India, and thereby erase the vestiges of caste feudalism; globalization has struck compromise with the local feudal apparatus. Hindutva, besides having a special ideological affinity with neoliberalism, has been the choice of the neoliberal camp. As for Dalits, there cannot be bigger evidence of this fact than the growing incidence of casteism indicated by the increasing number of atrocities during the reform period.

As neoliberal globalization accentuates the crisis of living for the people, the oppression of fascist Hindutva will also increase proportionately. Basically, the latter serves two purposes: one, it deflects the attention of the masses from the real issues and two, it reinforces conformism in them. Both facilitate imperialist operations through

globalization. As for Dalits who have been the historical victims of inhuman oppression of the religio-cultural system which Hindutva seeks to revive, the spectre is particularly ominous. Notwithstanding the lofty statements issued from various segments of its cohorts, the fact remains that anything Hindu is inconceivable sans caste. Savarkar, that great progenitor, philosopher and guide of Hindutva and one who is also credited with the efforts towards eradication of untouchability does represent the Hindutva vision with regard to, say, the *Manusmriti*, that vile code which Dalits hate most. Writes Savarkar, '*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on *Manusmriti*. Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu Law."[47] Does one need to look for the Hindutva vision elsewhere?

The spread of fascist Hindutva is bound to impact the interests of Dalits in terms of the demolition of their social agenda, subjugation of their identity, suppression of culture and their misuse as cannon fodder to further its fascist agenda. Hindutva can only hold forth the spectre of slavery and increasing atrocities of Dalits.[48]

The defeat of Hindutva forces in the last general elections is largely a result of the wrath of people against their mindless pursuit of neoliberal globalization. Those who were sceptical about the characterization of Hindutva as fascist would feel vindicated at the recovery of democratic space for people. They forget however that this space had not yet been lost; the power had not yet slipped into the hands of fascists entirely. Moreover, it is important to understand that electoral change does not necessarily mean change in ideologies and policies. As for the antecedents of the Congress is concerned, they have only been quantitatively different from the BJP. Both globalization as well as Hindutva were historically begun under its aegis which significantly helped the Hindutva forces to grow. They represented the ideology of the ruling classes. One hopes that the Congress has learnt a lesson or two during its years of exile from power. The neoliberal order is premised on the imperialist centre driving its agenda through its fascist gendarme in periphery. The change in the Congress can only be assessed

how it withstands the imperialist pressures and works for the alleviation of sufferings of its own people.

Conclusion

While, the existential trend towards making the state fascist and the people spiritual may be observed everywhere in the era of globalization, the situation in our country may be said to be worse. Here the native creed of Hindutva provides an astoundingly congruent ideology as well as the well-developed fascist infrastructure required for neoliberal globalization. This unholy nexus is of paramount importance for strategizing the Dalit struggle against their social oppression and material exploitation. Globalization is seen as a process of undermining the nation-state and therefore the struggle against it is considered possible only at the global level. This may be one of the reasons for the lack of resistance against globalization commensurate with the devastation it has been causing. While it is true that nation-states are weakened under globalization as far as their responsibilities towards people are concerned, they are made much stronger as a coercive instrument of the ruling classes. This could be seen, for instance, in the expenditure on police and military having gone up by more than four times during the globalization decade in our country.[49]

Since globalization essentially relies on the conduit of a nation-state, the anti-globalization struggle necessarily becomes a struggle against the nation-state. As the crisis deepens, the latter turns increasingly fascist warranting intensification of these struggles. In our country, Hindutva is the face of Fascism as well as the conveyer of the neoliberal globalization. The struggle against imperialist globalization therefore cannot be waged without simultaneously fighting against Hindutva. Contrary to commonplace notions, Hindutva is not a religious or cultural movement; it is essentially a political movement. Similarly, it is not a campaign just to butcher Muslims; it is a force to subjugate spirits of people into conformism and suppress their dissent. In its essence, it is a fascist movement and needs to be resisted with appropriate strategies. Fascism relies on lies, whipping mass hysteria, unleashing terror, and waging street fights; it warrants commensurate response from those opposed to it.

Dalits as the worst victims of this two-headed monster are the most critical constituents of this struggle. This monster has not only devastated their livelihood but also destroyed every hope of their emancipation. Unfortunately, they are yet to realize the magnitude of the damage done and the gravity of the impending calamity. The vested interests mislead them into believing that globalization would weaken castes and Hindutva would transcend castes. Nothing could be farther from truth. Neoliberal globalization neither has capacity nor scope for any such thing. Likewise, Hindutva, swearing by essential Hinduism, can never abolish castes. Empirically, Jajjhar[50] should serve as the reminder for Dalits what Hindutva has in store for them.

Globalization and Hindutva, insofar as they pose as a formidable enemy, should serve Dalits well in driving a vital lesson that they cannot fight this enemy on their own. Experience shows that even the castes cannot be effectively combatted relying just on caste forces. While the caste oppressions may warrant specific response from Dalits, in terms of anti-caste struggles, the latter need not be caste-based; they could be joined by all democratic forces transcending castes. While the Dalits must take strategic initiatives in this direction in their own interests, the forces swearing by class struggle also must realize that anti-caste struggle is an integral part of the democratic and anti-imperialist struggle in India.

Notes

1. V. D. Savarkar: *Hindutva, Who Is Hindu?* (Bombay, S. S. Savarkar, 1969): p. 116.
2. Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva, Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996); also *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004)
3. 'Advani wants Muslims to identify with 'Hindutva', *Times of India*, 30.1.1995.
4. Shramanism is a compendium term for the sects, which were opposed to Brahminism's beliefs and practices. They included Buddhism, Jaina, Lokayata and Ajivika and many other sects that struggled against Brahminism. It is only by A.D. 1000 that Brahminism overpowered Shramanism which far from disappearing has survived in other forms like Puranic religions, Bhakti, Vaishnavism, Shaivism. See Romila Thapar,

'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern search for a Hindu Identity', in *Modern Asian Studies* 23 (1989).

5. 'Caste mainly exists and functions as a regional system'. See M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967): p.117.
6. Romila Thapar, 'Syndicated Moksha', *Seminar* 313 (Sept 1985).
7. Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002).
8. Ram Puniyani, Review of *RSS's Tryst with Politics* by Pralay Kanungo. 'From Culture to Politics: RSS Bares Its Fangs.' *The Milli Gazette,* 19 Sept 2003; available at milligazette.com/Archives/1511200218.htm (accessed Oct 20, 2004).
9. Shamsul Islam, 'Call off the RSS Bluff', available at http://www.truthindia.com/page33.html (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
10. Ibid
11. M. S. Golwalkar, *The Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Vikram Prakashan, 1966): p. 227.
12. Shamsul Islam, 'Call off the RSS Bluff', available at http://www.truthindia.com/page33.html (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
13. The developments during the 1980s catapulted the BJP from mere 'two seats and apparent oblivion in 1984 to 86 seats in 1989 and the capacity to bring down governments'. Robin Jeffrey, 'Grand Canyon, Shaky Bridge: Media Revolution and the Rise of 'Hindu' Politics', *South Asia*, new series XXXV, 3 (Dec 2002): p. 285.
14. Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002)
15. Ashok Malik, 'The BJP, The RSS Family and Globalization in India', *Harvard Asia Quarterly* (Nov 1, 2003) available at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~asiactr/haq/200301/0301a002.htm (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
16. SJM came into existence on November 22, 1991 at Nagpur as decided by five organizations-BMS, ABVP, BKS, ABGP and Sahakar Bharati, all within the Sangh Parivar, with a formation of a Central Committee under the convenorship of Dr. M. G. Bakare (Ex Vice Chancellor, Nagpur University).
17. Jay Dubashi, *Organiser*, (Mar 15, 1992).
18. SJM criticized for instance government's every economic decision: allowing 100 per cent FDI in tobacco and liquor industries, award of second phase of Neyveli Lignite Corporation's power plant to an Italian firm Ansaldo Energia in preference to BHEL, inclusion of over 380

items in the OGL, Maruti-Suzuki deal, policy of signing counter-guarantee agreements for power projects, etc. See *Indian Express*, (1, Sept 1998).

19. P. Bourdieu, 'L'essence du neoliberalisme'. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (March, 1998) cited by Norman Fairclough, 'Language and neo-liberalism', *Discourse and Society* 11 (2) (Jun 5, 2002): pp. 147-48.
20. S. George, and F. Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: the World Bank's Secular Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994): p. 8.
21. Dr. Sue McGregor cited by Ed Finn, 'We're Fighting a Powerful Ideology: The First Step in Opposing Neoliberalism is to Understand It,' available at http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/articles/article300.html. (accessed: Mar 13, 2004).
22. In Chile, after the CIA sponsored coup dislodged the Allende government on 11 September 1973 amidst the bloodshed of Chileans in which Allende himself was assassinated and installed Augusto Pinochet as the dictator, Chile was handed over to a team of Chicago school economists under the supervision of Milton Friedman, an extreme proponent of the free market, to 'rebuild' the Chilean economy. The economic blueprint that was implemented in post-Allende Chile came to be forerunner of the neoliberal policy package of the IMF and World Bank.
23. For example, consider this famous quote from F. Hayek: 'From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict which each other; and we can achieve either one or the other, but not both at the same time.' Friedrich Hayek, in *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1978): p. 87.
24. Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, 'The Nature and Contradictions of Neoliberalism' in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds.), *The Socialist Register 2002: A World of Contradictions*, available at http://www.yorku.ca/socreg/DumenilLevy.htm (accessed: October 10, 2004).
25. Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, Global Capitalism and American Empire, available at http://www.insumisos.com/articulos/panitch_060404.pdf. (accessed: Oct 10, 2004)
26. Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower', *Foreign Affairs* 78 (2) (Mar-Apr 1999):p. 36.
27. Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997): pp. 40-41.

28. Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower'.
29. Subhash Kapila, 'United States Policies in South Asia under Bush: Continuity Is Expected', *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 181, available at http://www.saag.org/papers2/paper181.htm (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
30. See a report by 11 NRIs published by Sabrang Communications and The South Asian Citizens Watch, 'The Foreign Exchange of Hate: The IDRF (India Development and Relief Fund)', available at http://www.zmag.org/southasia/stopfundinghate/part3.html (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
31. Stephen P. Cohen, and Sunil Dasgupta, 'US-South Asia: Relations under Bush', available at http://www.stratmag.com/issue2Sep-1/page06.htm (accessed: Oct 10, 2004).
32. Robert Meyer, 'What Is Fascism', available at http://www.geocities.com/bobmeyer_us/meyer01.html, (accessed: Mar 13, 2004).
33. Achin Vanaik,*Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (Delhi: Vistaar, 1997):p. 238.
34. R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (Chicago: Proletarian Publishers, Third Printing 1978).
35. Achin Vanaik,*Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization*, (Delhi: Vistaar, 1997): p. 278.
36. Achin Vanaik,Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization (Delhi: Vistaar, 1997): p. 238-9.
37. Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Fascist Heritage', *Economic and Political Weekly* (22 Jan 2000): p. 219.
38. V. D. Savarkar first time synthesized the term Hindutva as racial, cultural, religious-spiritual unity, a unity of culture and territory in a pamphlet called *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*; see n 1.
39. Tilak always believed in nationhood on the basis of Hindu religion: 'The common factor in Indian society is the feeling of *Hindutva* . . . We say that the Hindus of the Punjab, Bengal, Maharashtra, Telengana and Dravida are one and the reason for this is only Hindu Dharama.', quoted by Amlesh Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1967): p. 61.
40. Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Fascist Heritage', *Communalism Combat,* March 2000. At this time in Britain, there was a lot of admiration from the aristocracy and the middle classes for Fascism. Many upper class Brittons admired Hitler. They were not enamoured of democracy because of the fear of the masses. At this time in India it was also 'patriotic' to admire the Germans vs. the Brits and make use of them, e.g.,

Subhash Chandra Bose.

41. Gueseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), an early idealistic revolutionary who was one of the leaders of the *Risorgimento*, the movement for getting rid of the Austrian rulers of Italy and to unite all the states under a republic. He was part of the revolutions of 1848 in Europe against aristocratic autocracy. The Italian Fascism, as admitted by Mussolini had multifaceted influences. Fascism was touted by Mussolini as a unique combination of 'thought and action', and Mazzini is identified as its source. This discussion is well covered in J. L. Radel, *Roots of Totalitarianism:The Ideological Sources of Fascism, National Socialism, and Communalism* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1975) see also James Whisker, 'Italian Fascism: An Interpretation', *The Journal for Historical Review* 4 (1) (Spring 1983): p. 5; John H. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought*, (New York, Holt, 1950): pp. 521-617; S.J. Woolf (ed.) *European Fascism*, (New York, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) and M. Halperin, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism*, (Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1964).
42. M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939).
43. Savarkar said in his presidential address to RSS members in Nagpur on 28 December 1938, 'if we Hindus in India grow stronger in time these Moslem friends of the League will have to play the part of German-Jews" See Partha Banerjee, 'In the Belly of the Beast,' excerpts available at http://www.foil.org/politics/Hindutva/partha.html#6 (accessed: Mar 12, 2004).
44. Kutty, Omar, 'Sources of Intolerance: The Modern Discourse of the Bharatiya Janata Party', *South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 4, 2 (Fall 1997); available at http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/pages/sagar/sagar4.2.html. (accessed: Mar 13, 2004).
45. Anand Teltumbde, Impact of Imperialist Globalisation on Dalits (Oppressed Castes) in India, a paper presented in the workshop for Mumbai Resistance 2004 on 18.1.2004. available at http://www.mumbairesistance.org/Papers/list.htm (acceessed: October 10, 2004)
46. Anand Teltumbde, 'Gujarat Carnage, Fascist Hindutva and the Role of Dalits.' in Sandeep Pendse (ed.), *Lessons from Gujarat* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2003): 115-136.
47. V. D. Savarkar, 'Women in *Manusmriti*'. In *Savarkar Samagar* (Collection of Savarkar's writings in Hindi), vol 4 (Delhi: Prabhat Publication, 2000): 416.
48. See Chapter 1, n36.

49. Arvind, *Globalisation: An Attack on India's Security* (New Delhi: New Vista, 2002): p. 18.
50. On the Dussera day, 15th October 2002, five dalits were lynched to death in open daylight by the VHP/Bajrang dal activists at Jhajjhar district of Haryana in active connivance with the police as they skinned a dead cow—their traditional vocation.

3

The Dalits and Hindutva: Gainers and Losers

Sandeep Pendse

Two recent occurrences have sparked off the current debate on the *new* relationship between Hindutva (which I define as the political and social programme of militant communal Hindu organizations—not to be confused with Hinduism, the approximate name for the Hindu religion) and the Dalits. The new relationship is one of apparent cordiality and of convergence of at least *political* interests. The first occurrence is the much publicized, apparently clearly visible participation of the Dalits en mass in the carnage of Muslims in Gujarat—particularly in Ahmedabad city—in March/April 2002.[1] The second occurrence is the apparently positive, at least partially, response to the call for unity of *Bhimshakti* (followers of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, obviously the Dalits) and *Shivshakti* (followers of Shiv Sena [SS], ostensible votaries of militant, read violent Hindutva) by the Working/Executive President of the Shiv Sena, Mr. Uddhav Thackeray (son and heir apparent of the SS supremo Mr. Bal Thackeray), by Dalit masses and their representatives. There are, of course, less dramatic occurrences. These mainly concern efforts by the BJP and by the core/parent organization the RSS to court and woo Dalit leaders, individuals, 'intellectuals', leaders, and masses. These include the inclusion of Dr. Ambedkar in its list of *prathasmaraniya* personalities, the appointment of a Dalit president of the party (the only scapegoat sacrificed at the altar of the Tehelka sting operation), the formation of a Samajik Samrasata Manch (Social Assimilation Platform), and so on.

The debate is slightly peculiar. It reeks strongly of a moral outrage. It has a strong 'You, too. Brutus?' character to it. In so far as it does so, it is also a very casteist response and reaction. It *ascribes* socio-political

positions to Dalit individuals and masses—a priori—based on their birth and situations/locations/positions in caste terms. It privileges caste identities over all others. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the apparent reality and look at the situation objectively.

A few points nevertheless must be noted. For many decades Dalit masses, individuals, leaders, and above all organizations and movements have indulged in a strident criticism of the Hindu religion that heaped upon them the inhuman institution of Untouchability. The critique was both theoretical and practical. In the most *radical* form, the critique questioned the caste system itself and as a revolutionary social programme called for its abolition. It was always understood that unlike other non- or anti-Brahmin caste masses the Dalit community was not interested in *caste consolidation*, in keeping caste barriers and identities alive. Its interests lay in the total abolition of the caste system. The dissolution necessarily had to be of the ideology of 'purity and pollution', which is the ideological/philosophical base of Brahminism, the programme of Brahmin superiority and domination that manifests as the prescription and project of chaturvarna or *varnashram dharma* (the system of division of society into four hierarchical strata based on occupations decided by birth). The Dalits did not consider cosmetic changes or 'reforms' within the framework either possible or even desirable. That is precisely why the Hindu efforts to 'mitigate' or even 'abolish' caste oppression/discrimination/differentiation did not excite Dalit masses or evoke a Dalit following. The ideologically and philosophically very different efforts of both Mahatma Gandhi and Savarkar, hence, left Dalit masses quite cold. Dalit critiques of the Hindu religion found practical expression in an abandonment of or 'walk out' from the Hindu fold. The non-vocal, non-organized format was of mass or molecular conversions over the centuries to religions that did not sanctify or recognize the caste system (at least formally and/or theologically): Islam and Christianity. The dramatic and politically visible vocal form, of course, was the mass conversion to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the 1950s.

The conversion to Buddhism was a social and political act. It was the step of a mass movement. It did not leave any space for accommodation, for compromise. It was a total rejection of the Hindu religion, the caste system and the ideologies of purity and pollution.

Loss of Cultural Vision

The conversions to Buddhism, though massive and spectacular, were confined to the active followers of Dr. Ambedkar and to the state of Maharashtra. The rejection of Hinduism was not a programme of the entire Dalit community all over the country. Members of a number of Scheduled Castes remained Hindu. They continue to be within the Hindu religious fold even today.

The Dalits nevertheless did not support Hindu political organizations. A few individuals did join the Shiv Sena and even obtained legislative positions as its members. The RSS and its various front organizations never managed to obtain the support of Dalits. The Hindu organizations too by and large ignored Dalits. They were till recently generally critical of Dr. Ambedkar and his positions. They did not appreciate or approve of the Dalit critique of Hindu religion. They generally did not support any of the demands of Dalits. They rarely if ever condemned atrocities against Dalits. In fact, their supporters or even members were often involved in such atrocities. The Shiv Sena in particular has opposed any Dalit agenda quite vehemently and at times even violently. The attempts to include Dalits in Hindu organizations were not sparked by any genuine criticism of the caste system. They were generally efforts to avoid internal divisions within the Hindu fold and to present a united face to the 'outside' opponents like Muslims and Christians. Yet another consideration was the numbers of Dalits in the country. Wooing Dalits was thus a political necessity for the Hindu organizations. Nevertheless, the efforts were neither serious nor very genuine.

The BJP since 1989 has increased its parliamentary presence. It won elections to some state assemblies in the early 1990s. In the 1998 and 1999 elections it became the single largest party in the parliament and along with some allies could form a government at the Centre. Despite this success, its share of votes remained around 20 to 24 percent, which was not enough to form a government on its own. This forced the BJP in particular to take the Dalit masses, at least as voters, seriously. The limits of the electoral success—continued narrow share of votes—made it seek new constituencies. The Adivasis and the Dalits are the natural social constituencies that it now attempts to cultivate. These efforts are a part and parcel of its attempts to break out of its

traditional support base in the Hindi-speaking belt, the middle classes, and the upper castes. Socially there was the genuine fear that the Adivasis and the Dalits provide fertile ground for the 'conversion' activity of particularly the Christian missionaries, thus weakening the Hindus through numbers and orientation. A political spectre also haunted the Hindu organizations, that of the political unity of the minorities, particularly the Muslims, the Dalits, the Adivasis, and other groups (castes) oppressed by brahminical Hinduism. Such a unity could completely topple the apple cart of the Hindu organizations and their programme of Hindutva: the transformation of India into a Hindu state.

The BJP along with the RSS has systematically tried to penetrate the Adivasis, the Other Backward Classes (OBC) as well as the southern and the eastern states in general in the past few years. The efforts have been at least partially successful. The attempts to attract the Dalits are of the same kind. One recent form has been an attempted appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar. The efforts are not exactly new. *Hindu* interpretations of Dr. Ambedkar have been around for some time. They essentially were directed at the Dalits—to convince them that Dr. Ambedkar was not anti-Hindu. Even his choice of Buddhism over Christianity or Islam was explained as a basic softness towards Hinduism. (There have been efforts for a long time to portray Buddha and Buddhism as essentially Hindu!) Currently the attempts have become political (as against intellectual interpretative). Dr. Ambedkar is now portrayed as anti-Muslim and hence by implication a supporter of the Hindu organization, Hindu consolidation, and perhaps Hindu supremacy. In this interpretation, he is painted as a person who might as well have been a supporter of the politics of the Sangh Parivar by projecting (fraudulently) a convergence if not unanimity of views.

It would of course be foolish to imagine that all Dalits at all times would hold the same views or have exactly the same political position. It was never so. Dalit individuals and masses have followed parties and organizations other than the exclusively Dalit ones. Significant sections outside Maharashtra followed the Congress. In Maharashtra too, some of the Scheduled Castes never truly accepted the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. After the death of Dr. Ambedkar, even his followers have faced numerous crises—social and political. Only a few mass leaders attempted to chart an independent course for the Dalits and raised basic demands relating to land and other means of livelihood. Others

have only raised demands related to the issue of reservations in jobs and sometimes symbolic ones relating to 'emotional', cultural issues.

The substantive issue was really the number of seats allocated to specific leaders of the Republican Party of India (RPI)—the political outfit that the Dalits inherited from Dr. Ambedkar. (The situation unfortunately has not changed substantially; for the parliamentary elections to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha in 2004, the Indian National Congress/Nationalist Congress Party combine had 'left' seats for three leaders: Ramdas Athavale, R. S. Gavai, and Jogendra Kavade of the RPI and had expressed willingness to 'leave' the seat of Prakash Ambedkar uncontested.) In addition, the RPI is fragmented into many sections, which unite periodically under the pressure of the masses and activists but break up again into leader-centred formations. The repeated splits appear to be caused by tactical differences over alliances, electoral alliances and personal ambitions of leadership. The once very militant and radical organization, Dalit Panthers, too is now fragmented in a similar manner.

The followers of Dr. Ambedkar were confined mostly to one particular caste amongst the Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar obviously wanted to create an organization of all the oppressed—the names of two of the organizations he created, Independent Labour Party and Republican Party of India—make this very evident. This was sadly not to be. The Dalits from other castes in Maharashtra do not have equally vocal or visible political organizations. They do not even have the numbers to form such organizations.

In other states, some political organizations of the Dalits do exist, somewhat outside the Ambedkarist fold, though all now invoke Dr. Ambedkar as the main source of inspiration. Amongst these, the most important is of course the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It has bases of support in some states, particularly in the Hindi-speaking belt. Dalit masses in these areas do look upon the BSP as their messianic saviour, representative and hope. The policies and politics of the BSP, however, often defy comprehension, being fathomable only to the two supreme leaders of the party. There are reasons to believe that its once well-knit and widespread matrix of organizations and support structures is weakening. A charismatic-populist politics has instead set in and settled down.

Currently another organizational expression, if one can term it

such, has to be taken into account. 'Dalit' NGOs provide this expression. Their publicity mechanisms (national and, far more important, international), all too visible and loud presence at most events and occurrences, and dramatic capacity to throw up issues create a formidable aura. Their ground level strength, mass bases, and capacity to really take up the Dalit cause, as well as ideology remain untested. The agenda too many times seems driven by funding and international publicity.

It is necessary to note one more phenomenon. A class of Dalit professional intellectuals has now emerged. A large number of them are independent and 'autonomous'. The 'autonomy' in many cases is not only from social and political organization but also from Dalit masses. The distance between the masses, their day-to-day life and reality, and the world (of ideas and practice) of the intellectual and political spokespersons and representatives (mostly self-appointed) are quite striking. There is a similar distance now between the life and realities of the rural and urban Dalit masses. This is particularly significant in the case of the youth who now have no real experience of rural situations and experiences.

Political Trajectory of the Dalits

The *politics* is confined to an iconization of Dr. Ambedkar and insistence on non-substantive symbolic apparently cultural demands. This agenda is extremely convenient to the upper castes and to the ruling class. Positive action through reservations in (government-aided) educational institutions, representative bodies of government, and government employment periodically evokes nasty comments from the upper castes but is not seriously challenged. Some violent incidents have of course taken place on the issue of reservations. These have not reversed the policies. The reservations become irrelevant in a molecular and almost invisible fashion today as under the new economic policies government employment shrinks and educational institutions are privatized. No dramatic opposition to reservations is necessary in such conditions. The concession-seeking political organizations are in no position to challenge or reverse these conditions. They become mostly irrelevant in such cases. The leaders and activists of these organizations

increasingly grow distant from the experiences and hence also the perceptions and aspirations of the Dalit masses—particularly the rural masses. (These conditions also create the backdrop for the relative success of BSP that charts a different agenda and course of action than the traditional Dalit parties, principally the RPI.) The Dalit masses then find themselves without genuine representatives, though the intellectual activity of the Dalits, and around Dalit issues, is widespread, intense, and deep over the past few years. Even formal academic activity focussed on Dalit issues has tremendously increased. The new theorization and intellectual advances have by and large not reached the Dalit masses who have not been empowered with new ideas or strategies.

The problem extends to the cultural sphere. The Dalit movement in many parts of the country, including Maharashtra, was marked by intense cultural innovative activity—mainly in the spheres of poetry and literature, and to some extent the performing arts. There is now perhaps more theorization about Dalit culture and a genuine investigation of the cultural traditions and praxis of the Dalits, but little mass cultural activity or attempts to create alternate radical rationalist democratic culture. The radical cultural initiative of conversion to Buddhism has also run out of steam.

The Dalit masses thus were in a kind of vacuum—ideologically, politically and culturally—when the forces of Hindutva initiated the efforts to recruit them to the Hindutva cause. That of course cannot explain the relative success—if it is that—of the forces of Hindutva to woo some sections of the Dalit masses. One of the factors was perhaps the 'change' in the forces of Hindutva. Commentators on the RSS have often noted and described its transformation under the leadership of the third chief of the organization—Mr. M. D. Deoras. The change has been termed by some as cosmetic and treated as a façade. It probably was more substantive than that. The ideology remained the same but the programme probably changed. The programme of *narrow* brahminical superiority and domination was replaced by a *new* understanding of Hindutva. It now became a programme of national rejuvenation and national rebirth for a global superiority and domination or versions of that. This required that the RSS break out of its narrow folds and directly or through fronts acquire mass support and mass base. This also meant it had to break language, caste and class barriers.

This was the transformation of the Sangh Parivar from a fringe right wing outfit to a truly fascist organization capable of attempting to implement the fascist programme in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. The Sangh Parivar then seriously wooed and accommodated castes it had hitherto not touched. It also made efforts to get a toehold in the intellectual life of the country. Some of these efforts were not to succeed immediately. The Sangh Parivar was prepared to wait—even for generations. It seized whatever political opportunities and chances it got to insert itself firmly in the social and political spheres. Some of the efforts started then bore fruits only after two decades!

Some elements may be enamoured with the idea of immediate access to governmental power. They may lose heart impatiently if they lose power. The RSS itself has a far more pernicious and profound agenda. It wants to transform the society and the polity. It has also shown itself capable of differentiating between the essential and contingent elements of the agenda. It has also shown enough flexibility to jettison the peripheral and accidental elements when they hinder the realization of the core programme and the grand vision. Seen in this light, the efforts to attract and accommodate the Dalits along with the Adivasis in the Sangh Parivar fold are neither fraudulent nor cosmetic. They are 'genuine'. The question remains what will be the RSS vision for the Dalits and whether the latter would at all be helped by it. That however must remain a task for another article. The task for this one is to look at the *material base* of the new relationship.

Here again two facts need to be noted. Firstly, Dalit individuals may have been drawn even in the past to ideologies of Hindu communalism. There are reports that the RSS in some places quite consciously recruited Dalits. One of the founders of the Dalit Panthers, who leads one faction of the organization to date, has been a close ally of the Shiv Sena for some years. Secondly, some Dalits have participated in violence against the Muslims even in the past. The Shiv Sena—in its initial years, prior to the formation of the Dalit Panthers—did attract Dalit youth who should have been part of the Ambedkarist movement. It was reported in 1992-93 that Dalits in some parts did attack Muslims. Thirdly, the current support of the Dalits to Hindutva forces seems to be larger, widespread and persistent as never before. A few factors make the current situation different and thus spark the current debate.

The individuals who appear on the platforms of the right wing organizations now claim to do so as representatives of the Dalit community and not merely as individuals. The alliance is projected as a social and political position of the community—not merely as ideological 'enlightenment' of some individuals. The general feeling, perhaps purposely created, also is that Dalit leaders and activists are aligning with the forces of Hindutva all over the country, in increasing numbers.

The response to the call for the unity of Bhimshakti and Shivshakti was not outright contemptuous rejection. Some activists and leaders welcomed the idea. Some dithered. One prominent leader said the unity was possible if the Shiv Sena abandoned its stand of militant Hindutva. It seemed that these people had either forgotten or at least forgiven the involvement of elements of the Shiv Sena in a number of incidents of violence against the Dalits, including the massive violence in Marathwada in 1978. This involvement is not an accidental occurrence of the distant past. It is a continuous trend. The involvement of the Dalits, though not in an organized manner, in the carnage of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 was also somewhat different. It did not seem accidental. In Ahmedabad it looked like a conscious acceptance of the position and leadership of the Hindu communal organizations. It is necessary to ask what material conditions propel Dalits to the new attraction of Hindutva. It is also necessary to ask why Hindutva makes these overtures and which Dalits feel attracted by these. Who gains and who loses in the new alliance?

Material Conditions and Base

The contemporary situation of the Dalits is quite contradictory. Caste discrimination persists to date in most parts of the country. It is particularly severe in the rural areas. Untouchability is officially banished but exists—for most rural Dalits—at the level of day-to-day almost subterranean practices. The names of the localities have changed but the residential quarters of the Dalits are still in isolated enclaves on the outskirts of the villages. Discrimination often takes violent forms. Crimes against the Dalits, in essence caste atrocities, are rampant. Killings, mutilations, physical assaults, rapes, public humiliation, attacks on their houses and localities, burning down of houses and

crops, social boycotts occur with a fair amount of regularity. Incomes in rural areas are abysmally low, poverty is intense—way above the national figures for the entire population—even in the most developed and advanced states. Landlessness is massive, under-employment or unemployment is quite common. The rate of dropouts after primary school is quite high. A duality in education exists in practice. Of the Dalits, a very few actually pursue careers in streams that are considered lucrative today—science and technology—at an advanced level. They are still largely confined to the humanities, languages and social sciences. These streams are not particularly efficient in the job markets. In the urban areas, a vast majority live in slums, work in insecure generally unskilled jobs in the informal sector and eke out a precarious living. They are repeatedly forced into traditional jobs, as sweepers and scavengers in the conservancy departments of municipalities and varied housing estates. The jobs in the public sector and organized sector have almost dried up. In industry too, the skills and grades structure parallels the caste hierarchy.

On the other hand, definite changes *have* taken place. Despite the tardiness, education has spread. There is now a pool of Dalit academics across the country. A number of them have acquired steady jobs in the teaching profession, in government services, and in public enterprises. A middle class has thus come into existence. The middle class is also not a first generation middle class. It has thus stabilized in its class locations and in its social attitudes. The Dalits, maybe from some specific castes, have also embarked on business ventures. Many have reached non-ceremonial important positions in public offices and bureaucracy. The percentage of the Dalits who have made good is very low, but the numbers are now not insignificant. They matter.

Changes have also taken place in the rural areas, though they are tardy and insufficient. The number of Dalit cultivators, the area they cultivate, and the size of their operational holdings is low compared to the average for the rural population of the country or any particular state. It is common knowledge that land reforms and land redistribution in India is at best patchy and in many cases only a paper entry. Some lands have nevertheless come to the Dalits, at least in some states. Pasturelands and village common lands in particular have been distributed. They have also made some small gains through various government schemes. Some have received training and some seed

capital for related occupations. Some have received some animals. Some have obtained houses. The proportions and absolute numbers are extremely low. The changes have however occurred. Some agricultural labourers have derived benefits from various schemes and legislations. The data regarding these facts are easily available from official and semi-official sources. It is therefore not necessary to load this essay with tables

There has also been a change in attitudes. Dalit youth—particularly ones with urban experience and upbringing—are defiant and assertive. They refuse, even on occasional trips back to the village, to take the traditional attitude of subservience to the upper castes/classes. Aware of their formal rights they insist on their fulfilment. They are often prepared to incur a confrontation to protect their rights—symbolic and substantive. Changes have not only been internal to the Dalit community. There have been numerous changes in the economy of the cities and villages as well as their social compositions. These also inevitably have an impact on them. To understand the political attitudes—particularly towards Hindutva—it is necessary to look at the impact of these changes.

The Rural/Agricultural Scene

The causes of violence against the Dalits in the current phase indicate something about the reality of their situation and conflicts in the rural areas. The violence is caused by issues relating to wages, land, water use, political participation (particularly where the panchayat has reserved seats/posts for them, social assertion, and inter-caste marriages (specifically of a Dalit boy with an 'upper' caste girl).

The conflict is now with farmers, those who personally cultivate or supervise the cultivation of their lands. These farmers in most areas are not the traditionally *dominant* castes, broadly Brahmins and Rajput-Kshatriyas, but middle and upper-backward *cultivating* peasant castes. The situation of these farmers is quite peculiar. They are the new entrepreneurial groups in agriculture as also the new economically dominant group—being the capitalists and petty capitalists in agriculture and related activities. These groups have made rapid economic progress. The political clout of these groups is uneven and compara-

tively new. They do not wield the same traditional ritual and ideological social power that the earlier dominant groups did. They need and demand greater democratization of access to political power and to resources. They also need to assert their position socially. This involves challenging the domination by the Brahmin and Rajput-Kshatriya combine on the one hand and subjugating the other 'lower' castes on the other hand. The rhetoric is thus of equality and egalitarianism while the practice is of domination. The hegemony of these groups is weak, probably still in formation. It is also likely to be ever incomplete since their presence is restricted to agriculture and related activities, forever and particularly in the age of globalization under a constant threat. They thus present two faces, broadly secular and democratic on one side while casteist and militantly oppressive on the other.

The traditional, feudal oppressors were in some senses *once removed* from the immediate scene of rural production. The new entrepreneurial groups are very rooted and inserted in the rural reality. As cultivators, they are in day-to-day command of the operations. The relationship with the Dalits—the marginal farmers, and far more the agricultural labourers in the same areas—thus is immediate, day-to-day, and essentially antagonistic.

It is, of course, naïve to imagine that capitalist operations in agriculture lead to secularization and democratization of all social relations in the rural areas. Capitalism does not do so anywhere in any sphere. It needs and attempts to generate producers and consumers with predictable, steady commonalities and least possible specific variations. It does not, however, automatically dissolve traditional identities, differences, discriminations. These often get interwoven and included in the capitalist social structure, which get utilized to create specificities of products and markets; and, more important, to maintain divisions amongst the workers. Ideological and social domination of the principal group of workers, for the sake of continued exploitation and compliance with supremacy of ruling class, is usually based on these traditional primordial differences and identities. Race, ethnicity, language, geographical origins, nationality, and caste as well as gender are utilized in a similar manner. Oppression of the traditional 'outsider' or 'lower' groups often acquires social acceptance or at least prevents general outrage and an effective unity of all oppressed.

The levels of violence thus may even be more intense now than they were in the past because in a number of areas the Dalits no longer obediently accept upper caste dictates. There is another marked difference. The Brahmins and the Rajput-Kshatriyas were seen as the carriers and spokespersons of traditional religious Hindu domination. They also represented the Hindu political forces in many areas. The middle and backward castes are not seen necessarily as representatives of the forces of Hindutva, though their attitudes are casteist. Politically, thus, the Dalits find themselves in conflict with organizations that represent the middle and backward castes that formally take a 'secular' stand, rather than with the Hindutva organizations. The latter have used this situation to appeal to the Dalits—to attempt to set them up against these social and political opponents—and promise protection and progress under the Hindutva umbrella. The disputes are both economic and social. In fact, the social atrocities are utilized to subdue the Dalits economically and keep them in bondage. The specific stands taken by the political and social organizations of the middle and upper-backward castes obviously influence the overall scene in different areas. These organizations are however by and large silent or in practice inactive about the situation of the Dalits.

The Dalits generally have no conflict with the Muslims in the rural areas. Only in small specific pockets, there may be competition or sometimes antagonism. The Dalits thus did not participate in the violence against Muslims in rural areas to any great extent even in Gujarat in 2002. In fact, in some villages they silently protected the Muslims. Similar incidents were also reported in 1992-93. The Dalits on rare occasion participated in the violence under compulsion or under ideological sway.

The Urban Scene

Industrialization and urbanization changed the nature of caste but did not abolish it. The discrimination became indirect and less visible but did not disappear. The Dalits were and are mainly workers, and thus constitute part of the working class. Over the years, however there has been a segregation and confinement to specific industries and particular kinds of jobs. The case of the textile industry in Mumbai is well known. Segregation seems to exist in departments, in pieces of equipment

(machines to be operated), as well as in tables in the canteen. The residential areas are clearly marked out, as localities, buildings or sub areas even within slums.

The shrinking job market has meant large-scale unemployment of Dalit youth, which creates lumpenization and thus recruits for both the lower ranks of the underworld and militant organizations of different varieties. Many scholars have attributed the participation of the Dalits in the violence against Muslims, in particularly Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 2002, to this large-scale unemployment and lumpenization along with a competition with the Muslims for similar employment and occupational opportunities. This explains part of the reality. The unemployment may not be an adequate reason for the appeal of Hindutva to the Dalits but it certainly constitutes an important factor. Its salience depends upon the general social and political situation. The prevalence of Hindutva ideology in a particular society is a significant factor in this regard. It occurs in conditions where the secular and Left movements and ideologies are weak. It reveals the reasons for participation in riots and in violence. It does not say why Hindutva holds sudden appeal for them.

Contemporary Capitalism, the Dalits, and Hindutva

The era of globalization has restructured the economy. The organized industrial sector has dwindled. There is large-scale unemployment. There is also no hope of employment in the foreseeable future. Production is diverted to small units in the unorganized sector that offers no security of employment or wages. There is a constant and permanent drift. The competition for jobs is also intense. Increased migration from rural areas further intensifies the competition. Petty self-employment has forced many former and potential workers into insecure, marginal existence. Collectivities are breaking down at all levels. The broad picture is of constant insecurity, the precarious existence, the invisibility of the system, shrinkage of social welfare and security nets, loss of hope and absence of genuine organizational representation. This leads to restlessness, unfocussed anger, a search for genuine or imagined palpable assailable enemies, and a hankering for direct action for immediate redress of grievances.

The background is the weakness of radical Dalit and secular or-

ganizations. In Ahmedabad, they are almost absent. There is no real tradition of working class, radical movements. The centrist movements have now become ineffective. Elsewhere too Dalit and Left organizations are mostly weak and in a defensive mode. They have very few actions at the civil society level. They have been unable to create radical, democratic, secular, non-commercial cultural alternatives. The organizations were based on the premise of a vigilant, interventionist, responsive and active state, whatever its ultimate class and caste character. The shrinkage and withdrawal of the state also leaves the organizations without a clear agenda. They lose their potency to represent, protect and advance the interests of Dalit masses. Historically the Dalit organizations were unable to make the transition to a revolutionary ideology, programme and action. This too makes them vulnerable in the contemporary phase of capitalism.

The Dalit masses then are at a loss. They also search for an identity and through that community support and collective action. The role of assertion of Dalit identity was revolutionary. It brought together the most oppressed people. It gave them a sense of dignity and personhood. It clearly identified the reasons for their oppression and terrible status in the system of caste and in vile sinful acts of commission of the upper caste ruler-managers of Hindu society. It gave them a basis to resist and fight against the oppression. It also laid the foundations for a vision of a future society free of any exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. It provided the nucleus for a search for new culture that also was expressed through the Buddhist tradition. Practically it provided a focus for organization that could negotiate concessions and protective legislation. The identity that at least a section of the mass now needs is an assertive identity—however illusory it may be—not one that encapsulates and identifies oppression and degradation. Hindutva in the current stance creates the illusion of that identity for the Dalits, and at least some of them fall a prey to the invitation by the spider into its parlour!

The major support base of Hindutva comes from the middle class. The diaspora plays an equally important role. The majority of the middle class—resident Indian and NRI—finds that forces of Hindutva represent its interests and articulate an ideology that suits it, and is a vocal and active supporter. It has no interest in the Dalit masses or cause. It only wishes to include the Dalits firmly in the Hindu fold. It

may not have overcome its casteist attitudes but no longer needs to actively exhibit or parade them. It practices its casteism silently and subtly. It therefore is not opposed to some marginal reforms even in the ritual sphere. It is not in real competition with the Dalit middle class. The educated middle class Dalits only take up positions and occupations that the 'upper' caste middle class no longer wants.

The capitalist class as a whole has no conflict with the economic and social policies of the BJP-led NDA government. Its response to aggressive communalism and to the agenda of Hindutva is however not uniform. The trading lobby as well as the up-start speculators have generally supported the agenda of Hindutva. The industrial lobby has not been happy with policies that lead to communal violence. This contradiction is reflected in the tension (however superficial) between different organizations within the Sangh Parivar and between its 'moderate' and 'hard-line' faces. The defeat of the NDA at the parliamentary elections of 2004 has changed the situation for the BJP. It seems to lack a clear direction and newspaper reports indicate a struggle between different factions within the party over the immediate course. The allies no longer want to identify with the BJP even though they have not quit the NDA. The core support of the RSS remains unaltered but the other supporters have wavered.

Dalit Middle Class

The discussion cannot be complete without a mention of the Dalit middle class. As mentioned earlier, it is now at a distance from the experiences, grievances, and aspirations of the Dalit masses, both urban and rural. It has now come into its own and developed distinct interests. It now aspires not for a distinct and separate identity but for assimilation and acceptance within the mainstream, including the Hindu fold. It no longer even promotes any democratic, radical cultural expressions. It wishes above all integration.

Conclusion

The questions can now be asked again. What material interests propose inclusion of the Dalits within the Hindutva fold? Which section does the proposal attract? The answers as argued are not very simple.

Complex mechanisms are at work. The political and social forces of Hindutva wish to prevent any opposition to Hindutva by the Dalits in unity with other oppressed sections including the religious minorities. They also need the numbers of the Dalits for electoral purposes and for extra-parliamentary actions, including violent communal outbursts. The Dalit middle class is partially in grip of the desire for integration and acceptance. The Dalit masses are mostly rudderless without any effective leadership. They are unwitting victims of the fraudulent promise of inclusion as equals within the mainstream.

Note

1. See for instance, Anand Teltumbde, *Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat*, available at http://www.countercurrents.org/dalit-gujarat.htm.

4

Hindutva's Social Engineering: Participation of Dalits in the Anti-Muslim Pogrom, Gujarat 2002

Ram Puniyani

The rise of Hindutva politics has brought to the fore a very complex phenomenon. Hindutva as the politics of the elite upper caste/class Hindus aims to maintain the status quo of caste and gender relationships, manifests its politics by propagating hate against the minorities in general and the Muslims in particular. The rights of Dalits in particular are the main targets of Hindutva politics. While this is the core phenomenon, what appears at the surface is the 'Hate Minority' campaigns, which in turn creates a social hysteria, violence and an intimidating atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the core issues of society relating to bread, shelter, employment and the like get undermined. At the same time one is witnessing the political alliance between the Hindutva party, the BJP, and the 'Dalit' party, the Bahujan Samaj Party. Similarly, one is witnessing that the same Dalits, whose rights are on the chopping block of Hindutva, are being mobilized as the foot soldiers of this politics. The Gujarat carnage showed in a crystal clear fashion how the politics of Hindu communalism could use its prime target, its prime victims, to browbeat Muslims, who are projected as the main threat to Hindu unity. In a way the majority of Indian Muslims are ex-untouchables. The present events are turning them into new untouchables. In this game the Dalits are the handmaidens for achieving the agenda of the Sangh Parivar, the goal of Hindu Rashtra, a concept that is the polar opposite to the concept of secular democratic India.

Hindutva, or the politics aiming to bring about a Hindu Rashtra, is the new edition of *Manusmriti* in the modern context. It is interesting how social engineering and politics can be manipulated to use prime targets to be unleashed upon the secondary targets in order to bring back the birth-based hierarchies in a refined and modern garb.

Indian Society: Caste System

The caste system has been the basic hallmark of Indian society. There are various theories about its origin. The original myth describes primeval sacrifice and the emergence of four groups, 'Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, which were subsequently called the four varnas. Jatis [castes] are not mentioned until the later part of the corpus.'[1] 'The Aryans were the dwija or twice-born castes (the first being the physical birth and the second being initiation into caste status), consisting of Kshatriyas (warriors, aristocracy, the Brahman (priests) and the Vaishya (cultivators), the fourth caste, Shudras, were *dasas*, and those of mixed Arya *Dasa* origin.'[2] A late hymn of the Rig Veda provides a mythical origin of the castes:

> When the gods made a sacrifice with the man as their victim, when they divided the man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called. The Brahmin was his mouth, of his arms were made the warrior Kshatriyas. His thighs became the Vaishyas, and of his feet the Shudras were born.[3]

By making caste as the system devised by Lord Brahma, it was put beyond the pale of questioning or being challenged. This way the social organization was able to sustain the production and exploitation of the low castes. The tyranny of the upper castes was dual: economic and social and political. Over a period of time strict rules of marriage were enforced; this was always within one's caste, in other words, endogamy was followed, which reinforced and perpetuated caste. By and by the caste-based hierarchy became rigid and the Shudra castes were excluded from inter-dining as well as inter-marriage. This found

reflection in the rigid theories of Manu, whose Manav Dharamashastra (Human Law Code), known as the *Manusmriti,* codified these practices into laws.

Islam in India: Conversions

Despite popular belief, the conversions to Islam were not due to the influence of Muslim kings. It was a miniscule minority, which took to Islam due to the intimidation of Muslim kings or lure for power. The majority of conversions to Islam took place from the low caste Shudras who were won over by Islam primarily because of its intrinsic egalitarian attitude and the influence of the humanistic teachings of the Sufi saints. Shudras, despite being the formal part of the Hindu fold, were under the severe oppression and repression of the upper caste Brahmins and Brahminism. To quote Vivekananda, 'Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammadens? It is nonsense to say that the sword converted them. It was to gain liberty from Zamindars and Priests.'[4] Later the converts swelled in number due to the impact of the Sufi saints, who used local customs and rituals to propound the humanistic aspects of Islam. The major converts to Islam do come from the Shudras, and rough estimates will show that 95 percent of Indian Muslims came from this category. During the Mughal rule, though the Muslim aristocracy came from some descendants of the invading Muslims, in due course, many a Hindu raja and landlord allied with the Muslim kings. Akbar's court had Raja Mansingh, Raja Birbal and Raja Todar Mal in high places. 'Hindus formed roughly 24 percent of the nobility under Shah Jahan, they accounted for about 33 percent of nobles during second half of Aurangzeb's reign, while their total number rose to one and a half times.'[5] Barring the aristocratic sections of Muslims, the majority of Muslims shared their plight with the low caste Shudras. The caste system started affecting the Muslims also, though in a mild manner, and the Muslims came to be divided into two main groups, *Ashraf* (*Sharifjate*) and *Ajlaf* (*Kaminjate*).

Both low caste Hindus and the majority of Muslims shared a common cultural and social life. Their spirituality was expressed more in the Sufi movement and the Bhakti movement rather than through *ulema* or Brahmins. As such Dalitbahujans and Muslims shared a great deal of social and cultural life, 'With the Turukoollu [Muslims] we shared

several cultural relations . . . We both celebrated the Peerila festival. Many Turkullooo come with us to the fields. The only people with whom we had no relations, whatsoever, were Baapanoollu [Brahmins] and Koomatoollu [Baniyas].'[6]

British Period: Social Transformation

The social and political hierarchy prevalent in this country started breaking with the changes brought in by British rule and more so by their plunder project. The necessity for workers in the newly set up factories, the introduction of modern education, which was made accessible to all sections irrespective of their castes, started the process of erosion in the centuries old caste structure. Mahatma Jotirao Phule's recognition of the needs of the low castes was very apt. He worked for the education of this section of society. 'This social mobility also made these upcoming men from the lower strata painfully aware of the need for acquisition of literary skills to secure employment.'[7] In due course it started to break the gender hierarchy as well. The middle and late nineteenth century was a period of great turmoil. It saw multiple aspirations being articulated. On the one hand there was emergence of the Indian National Congress (INC) as a representative of the newly rising classes, which was amongst its Hindu adherents, mostly an upper caste phenomenon. One also witnessed the movements initiated by Phule. He elaborated the deeper mechanisms of the Brahmin rule. According to him, it was a regime that used state power and religious hegemony to maintain exploitation. His contribution to the renaissance movement is yeomen, as today he is regarded in the highest esteem not only by the Dalit movement but also by the women's movement. In his book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma*, he propounds a religion of the same name, calling for gender equality in the strongest terms. He condemns the then prevalent brahminical Hinduism as the perpetuator of superstition, a bag of tricks, and a weapon of domination. Very interestingly, in this book, he refers to an ideal family in which, the father becomes a Buddhist, the mother a Christian, the daughter a Muslim and the son a Satyadharmist. He does not put Hinduism in this scheme of things and puts the condition of it being recognized only if its upholders, the Brahmins, give up the claim to be 'earth-gods'.

This period saw the early simmering of the process, which had the elements of breaking birth-based hierarchies. At this juncture, three main movements are discernible. One, those related to the national movement, the one around the INC. This movement asked for more facilities for industrialists, more scope for educated classes and for land reforms. Two, the Dalit movement emerged in the form of the pioneering work of Jotirao Phule. The third one was the one of women's emancipation which laid the base for women coming to social space and later strove for equality. The Hindu elite class, the declining classes of the landlords, did react to this situation. The Brahmin-zamindar nexus felt a double threat. Firstly, it perceived that the rise of the INC was going to eclipse their political power based on divine right. Secondly, they perceived the threat from the movement of the Dalits, untouchables, who were getting some education and aspired to move to the cities to work in the factories, thus breaking the shackles of brahminical ideology. In practice it would mean that the Dalits would escape from the hegemony of the landlords.

Hindu Nationalism: Early Formulations

This process was also accompanied by various reforms and this posed a challenge to the existing social structure. 'As a response to this threat a number of high caste Hindus, mostly Brahmins, undertook to reform their society and its religious practices in order to adapt them to Western modernity while preserving the core of Hindu tradition, which they defined mainly in brahminical terms.'[8] The embryo of Hindutva can be discerned in Swami Dayanand Sarsawati's formulations. These were the basis of the Arya Samaj. Saraswati rejected the social system, jati or caste, and called for preservation of varna at the same time, 'his reinterpretation enabled him to rehabilitate a social system of ritual hierarchy, in the guise of the so-called ancestral varna system. Even though he considered Brahmins to be responsible for repression and the decline of Hindu society, the alternative social model he proposed was based largely on a traditional—mainly brahminical—worldview, as his strict endogamy of the varnas indicates.'[9] These were broadly the ideas, which underlined Hindu nationalism all through.

Among the landowning elite (landlords, nawabs, rajas) response to this phenomenon came in the form of United India Patriotic Associa-

tion, which opposed the politics of the INC and called for the loyalty of Indians to the queen of England. Later the Hindu communal elements were to separate from this association to form the Punjab Hindu Sabha, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, joined by some from other organizations including the INC.

It was difficult for the Brahmin-zamindar alliance to oppose the social changes that were taking place among the Dalits. Instead, they focused on the opposition to Muslim communal politics, the Muslim League, that was mainly formed by the Muslim elites. This Hindu elite came up with the formulation of Hindutva, which was properly articulated by Savarkar in 1923. While the primary opposition was to the rise of Dalits and also of women, who were giving up seclusion to participate in national politics, the reaction manifested in the form of opposition to the Muslims as a whole. This was the process of deflection, in which the primary goal is kept under wraps for reasons of logistics and the whole debate is focused on the non-issue and another target is manufactured and projected as the primary enemy. The opposition to Muslims, projection of the Muslims as a threat, falls in this category. As such, Muslim and Hindu landholders and rajas had nothing to fear from each other. They had their separate territories to rule and exploit. But this religion-laced language and politics could act as a good handle to mobilize the middle sections of society for political goals.

Along with the emergence of Dalits, that is, their coming to avail of modern education and migrating to cities for employment, the embryo of the Hindutva movement came up with rabid anti-Muslim rhetoric. One recalls that the Hindu landholders had no obstacles during the Mughal rule. One also recalls that the Brahmins had no problems during the Mughal empire as such; overall Hindu landlords and Brahmins, who formed a nexus, did not suffer during Mughal rule. The British, in pursuance of their divide-and-rule politics, brought in the communal view of history and projected themselves as the saviours of the Hindus from the tyranny of the Muslim rulers' atrocities. Trying to be loyal to the British, this section fully accepted the British view, which also served as a good cover to hide their opposition to the process of caste and gender transformation which had began in a small way during the mid-and late nineteenth century, as mentioned earlier. This clever ploy was to underline Hindutva politics all through: 'From the 1870s, a section of Hindu zamindars, moneylenders and middle class

professionals began to arouse anti-Muslim sentiments. Fully accepting the colonial view of Indian history, they talked of "tyrannical" Muslim rule in the medieval period and the liberating role of the British in "saving" Hindus from Muslim oppression."[10]

Early Twentieth Century: Hindutva Crystallizes

Hindu communal politics began to intensify gradually with the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha. Its agenda was to oppose the process of social transformation whereby the low castes were trying to come out of the grip and tyranny of the upper castes. As it was not possible to oppose social transformation in a blatant way, they resorted to preserve the brahminical order by calling for the need for Hindu unity vis-à-vis the outside enemy, the Muslims. While the national movement had the agenda of opposing British rule, the early Hindutva ideologues aimed at being in the good books of the British, to neutralize them so that they could act against the enemy (the Muslims). Lal Chand, a Hindu nationalist ideologue, in his book *Self-Abnegation in Politics* pointed out that 'Hindus should try to neutralize the third party, the Government, in their fight against Muslims.'[11]

Dr. Moonje, one of the major ideologues and later one of the founders of the RSS, wrote,

> If the Chaturvanya [the system of the four orders], which is a distinctive feature of the Aryan civilization in the world, is to be maintained and to prosper, as I believe it should, and yet union and solidarity is to be evolved, it must give up its system of water-tight compartments of caste and bring about a real organic unity between the four sections which can be done by again bringing into vogue the system of marriages of what are called *Anuloma* (higher caste man marrying low caste woman) and *Pratiloma* (low caste man marrying high caste woman) *paddhti* (tradition) as provided in our Dharmashastras with a view to bind the four sections of society in blood connections and thus bring out the organic unity out of the very diversity of sociological functions allotted to these four original varna and caste. [12]

Christophe Jaffrelot points out,

> The Hindu Nationalist eulogy of the varna system must also be reinterpreted in the social context of the majoritarian community itself: in Maharashtra in 1920s there arose an anti-Brahmin movement and then an agitation of untouchables led by Dr. Ambedkar. Hence the attempt by high caste reformers to promote hierarchical but prestigious social models such as the varna system . . . in 1923 the Hindu Mahasabha voted in favour of resolution calling for untouchables to enjoy access to roads, schools . . . However this egalitarianism was presented in an organicist model of society in which social hierarchy was merely relaxed through reinterpretation of the varna system. This hierarchical model remained in effect a mainstay of identity and the caste system was to be reformed largely in order to legitimize it.[13]

This fear of cracks in the caste hierarchy were linked with the conversions of low castes to Islam and other religions. In the wake of the Khilafat movement at the end of World War I, these stereotypes against Muslims coalesced with an emerging Hindu nationalist ideology. Rather than doing away with the caste system, Hindu nationalism projected the fear of Islam and Muslims and made it a part of Hindu communal common sense. The real agenda of the preservation of the caste system was hidden and an external enemy was projected with full vigour to camouflage its agenda.

The introduction of separate electorates played the role of intensifying the projection of Muslims as the 'enemy'. 'The colonial authorities and the communalists together evolved another power instrument for the spread and consolidation of communalism in separate electorates which were introduced in the Morley-Minto reforms of 1907. Under this system Muslim voters and (later Sikhs and others) were put in separate constituencies from which only Muslims could stand as candidates.'[14] It led to strengthening of communal identities, which was what intended by the 'divide and rule' policy of the British.

As the concept of Hindutva evolves, there is a gradual transition from the possibility of collapse of the caste and gender hierarchies to the threatening Other, who is accused of trying to destroy Hindu unity and the Hindu Nation. Savarkar emerged as the major ideologue of Hindutva who coined this word and the concept in a clear way. The threatening Other is the mainstay of this ideology and internal inequalities are glossed over while subtly glorifying the era when these hierarchies were the major markers of society:

> O Hindus, consolidate and strengthen Hindu Nationality; not to give wanton offences to any of our non-Hindu compatriots, in fact to any one in the world but in just and urgent defence of our race and land; to render impossible for others to betray her or to subject her to unprovoked attacks by any other 'Pan-isms' that are struggling forth from continent to continent.'[15]

Savarkar further identifies the territory from Sindhu to the seas as the home of Hindu Culture and Hindu people (see also Essay 2). 'The mix of brahminical Hinduism with nationalism reflecting the interests of the upper castes and part of the upper class was defined and later refined on the exclusionist principles, which are so basic to Brahminism.'[16]

Social Content to Hindu Rashtra: The RSS

The inspirations behind the formation of the RSS show the agenda of Hindutva. From the 1920s, Gandhi's arrival on the political scenario resulted in the reduction of the Brahmin influence in the Congress. Gandhi, a devout Hindu, was closer to the Bhakti traditions of Hinduism as opposed to the brahminical values, which were the foundation of Hindu nationalism. The RSS was to continue this *deflection* further, 'however its dominant mission as an ideological akhara, was clearly directed against the Muslim, as the events of 1927 in Nagpur reveal. RSS volunteers were involved in a riot during the procession of Mahalakshmi (the festival of Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity).'[17] 'The centrality of Maharashtra in the formation of ideology and organization of Hindutva in the mid-1920s might appear rather surprising, as Muslims here were a small minority and hardly a

threat, and there had been no major riots in this region at that time. Maharashtra had witnessed a powerful anti-Brahmin movement by the backward castes from 1870s onwards, when Jotirao Phule had founded the Satyashodhak Samaj. By the 1920s, the Dalits had started organizing themselves under Ambedkar. Hindutva in 1925, as in 1990-1991, was an upper caste bid to restore the slipping hegemony.'[18]

Gandhi's arrival on the centre stage of Indian politics in 1920 came as a big setback to Hindu nationalism. Ashish Nandy points out that Gandhi was resented by the upper caste Hindus because he posed a real danger to their social position. His mobilization of the lower strata of society 'threatened to alter the basic characteristics of Indian society by making its cultural periphery, its centre'.[19] 'Furthermore Gandhi antagonized many a Maharashtrian Brahmin who joined the RSS because of his [Gandhi's] Hinduism, largely influenced by Bhakti, excluded many brahimincal values.'[20]

Hindutva Flexes Muscles

The Hindu Mahasabha-RSS movement remained on the margins for a long time. The process of industrialization and the growth of educational facilities were the major markers of independent India, and Dalits and women also started benefiting from this in some ways. The constitutional safeguards of reservation supported the entry of Dalits into the social space in large numbers. The RSS family never came into the open to oppose the reservations for tactical reasons but implicitly and by word of mouth kept attacking the low castes as the 'sons-in-law' of the government, the undeserving privileged people. It did not bring this anti-Dalit bias out in the open till the early 1980s when the first anti-Dalit riots were unleashed in Gujarat in 1980 and then in 1984. These riots were aimed at the Dalits who were beneficiaries of the reservation system, which gave them access to medical and engineering colleges. The 1984 one was against the job quotas for the backward but not untouchable castes. 'During both these agitations, the Brahman, Bania, Patidar combine acquired savarana [caste Hindu] unity. In both the agitations, the Sangh Parivar directly or indirectly supported the savaranas.'[21]

Nandy and his co-editors point out that after the 1981 agitation, the national leadership of the BJP became conscious of the growing resent-

ment that the Dalits felt for them. By the mid-1980s they had systematically started coopting the Dalits and the Adivasi communities. Nandy and his co-editors explain this disturbing trend as being due to the apparent capacity of the Parivar to provide an easy channel of upward mobility to the Dalits within Hindu society. 'It seems that a sizeable number of Dalits, despite popular stereotypes, have been looking for such an alternative model of Sanskritization. In this model, a violent or heroic defence of Hinduism allows one to transcend one's lowly caste status, at least temporarily.'[22] The process of social engineering came to the fore during the early 1980s. 'Earlier the ultimate symbolic target of hate was the Dalit, now it was the Muslim.'[23]

The complex process of social engineering was consciously carried out by different wings of the Sangh Parivar.

> These anti-reservation agitations played a key role in consolidating the base of upper castes and upwardly mobile middle classes. The Sangh Parivar stood by to support these upper caste onslaughts. By using clever strategies the Sangh Parivar was also able to give an upwardly mobile channel to a section of Dalits, who were aspiring for a better place within Hindu society. In Gujarat one can clearly see the social functionality of creating the 'other' (Muslim). Here, earlier the ultimate object of hate was the Dalit, by a clever manoeuvre, the Muslim was substituted for that, the Dalit has been unleashed upon the 'other', an atmosphere of terror was created, which helped to maintain a 'status quo' of social hierarchy . . . (Muslim). Various Yatras and campaigns by the VHP gave cohesion to this social base.'[24]

Mandal-Mandir and Ascendance of Hindutva

The BJP at the national level was a marginal force till the mid-1980s. Its social base, the affluent middle class, the rich peasant and the petty industrialist, was coming into being by the early 1980s but the BJP as a political party was a non-phenomenon. The compulsions of the Janata Dal politics led V. P. Singh to announce the implementation of the Mandal commission, a 27 percent reservation for the 52 percent Other

Backward Classes (OBCs) of the country. The response to Mandal in a way was the litmus test for different parties. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena opposed it in a very vocal fashion but the BJP's response to this was ambivalent, as Manini Chatterjee says, 'though it cautiously supported it, and only asked for inclusion of economic criterion, the party's rank and file were virulently opposed to it . . .By September 1990, when the anti-reservation movement led by the upper caste students was setting the country aflame, the entire RSS combine decided to unleash the Ramjanmbhoomi movement with all the strength at its command.'[25] Chatterjee goes on to state,

> The upper castes and urban middle classes who formed the core of the BJP were angered by the party's equivocal stand to the Mandal issue. But at a more basic level, caste conflict was anathema to the RSS. Right from its inception in 1925, the RSS had sought to gloss over the deep intra-Hindu conflicts that threaten its upper caste base by making out Muslims as the enemy. The entire Ramjanmbhumi movement acquired a new consciousness among the Dalits and backward castes that was slowly gaining ground.[26]

The Rath Yatra was the most symbolic of Hindutva politics. It aimed to demolish the Babri Masjid, and surface an anti-Muslim programme. The date chosen to demolish the masjid was also symbolic, 6 December, the death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. The BJP's action was primarily a response to the Mandal, a pro-Dalit move threatening to disturb the caste equations in society.

The post-Babri Masjid demolition phase saw the continuation of the same processes at the social level. The fragmentation of the Dalit movement gave an opportunity to the Hindutva politics to keep co-opting a section of Dalits looking for upwardly mobile channels, and many of the other sections being socially engineered by the conscious mobiliztion of the Sangh Parivar, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in particular. Similarly, the RSS has also floated an organization called Samajik Samrasata Manch (Social Assimilation Platform) to attract sections of Dalits for the purpose of developing 'Hindu unity'; the main feature is that the material problems are not addressed and an assertive cultural identity is brought to the fore. Amongst the Dalits,

the new middle class aspired for higher status within the Hindu social fold. The Sanskritization process made them imitate the upper castes and to ignore and forget the material plight of their deprived brethren. The deprived ones amongst them got swept into the cultural whirlpool of Swadhyay, Asaram Bapus, Swaminarayan type sects and Pandurang Shashtris, which are dime a dozen by now. They are bringing in the traditional brahminical values in a modern garb, laced in the sugary syrup of cultural identity. These outfits have spread the idea of Hindutva and the pride in being Hindu, based on Hindutva ideology, cutting across different communities. Joseph Macwan points out that 'enamored by their wealth and power the Ambedkerite Dalits turned towards the BJP. Those who aligned themselves with the RSS also managed to acquire power.'[27]

The core of the RSS project through all these mechanisms has been to turn all castes against Muslims and Christians. A dagger in the velvet cloak was pierced through the material aspirations of the Dalits. The ideology of the status quo at the level of pre-industrial norms; Hindutva, has been imposed in a most respectable form. The Sangh Parivar has also used different social facilities like night schools and youth camps to subsume the Dalit identity into a pan Hindu identity. As Anandi has said, 'Many Dalits have subordinated their caste identity and claimed themselves as Hindus.'[28] The degeneration of the Dravida Munnetra movement into the AIDMK and the capitulation of the present DMK to the brahminizing influence need no recounting. The upwardly mobile aspirations of sections of Dalits have given the Sanskritization process a boost.

This onslaught has operated at three levels. At the level of ideology the BJP has been saying that it does not believe in the caste system. Further the origin of the caste system itself has been shifted from the original codes of Manu to the influence of 'foreign' religions! Apparently, the invading Muslim kings wanted to convert all and sundry by force. And those who defied this had to face lots of ignominies and had to flee. The RSS on the caste system has similar views. Here, in a clever move, the polar opposite nature of what the BJP and the RSS believe is hidden from the people. Dr. Ambedkar burns the *Manusmriti* and presides over the drafting of the Indian Constitution. The RSS upholds the *Manusmriti* and asks that the Indian Constitution be rejected.

Conclusion

We can recount that the primary aim and goal of Hindutva has been an opposition to caste and gender equality. Hindutva began in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the wake of cracks developing in the brahminical social order. The reaction was expressed in the anti-Muslim formulation. In the early twentieth century as the process of the anti-Brahmin movement gained strength, the consolidation of Hindutva into the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS took place and the anti-Muslim rhetoric has been heightened By now the duo has developed a language whereby the aspirations of the lower castes are deflected. An imaginary Hindu unity is projected and the manufacturing of an external enemy is intensified. Ambedkar's movement bases itself on the material and the Shudras. Hindutva has made Ambedkar an icon and focused on anti-Muslim campaigns as a clever ploy.

The early part of the 1990s saw the blatant anti-Dalit pogrom led by Sangh Parivar outfits. The conscious planning on the part of Hindutva ideologues has resulted in co-opting the Dalits. It had taken up an anti-Muslim campaign in the form of the Babri Masjid dispute. The anti-Muslim hysteria has been intensified in the wake of growing terrorist attacks, particularly after the attack on World Trade Center and the US attempts to present Islam as the threat to civilization.

Some historical parallels may guide us to the role of *deflection* in the repressive politics of Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's fascists. In the case of Germany the basic problem was the crisis of the economic order, the problems were deflected onto the Jews in an attempt to save the interests of capitalists, and Jews were put to the gas chamber. In the process, the hysteria, which was created, ensured that democratic norms were suppressed and human rights of weaker sections were put on the chopping block. There is an interesting difference however. Many wealthy capitalists were Jews, many of the leading intellectuals were Jews, that is, a cultured elite; no doubt there were poor Jews, but the high profile came from those who were financiers, artists, intellectuals. In India, the target is people who are most culturally and educationally deprived. In India today the weakening caste (and also gender) hierarchy is the real issue. Muslims and partly Christians are the collateral victims of the onslaught of Hindutva. The wickedness of this politics comes to the fore when one sees the Gujarat carnage where the

real victims of the Hindutva agenda are used as the weapon to do away the constructed 'external' enemy.

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5

Between Her Legs: Hindutva and Dalit Women

Meena Kandasamy

To write about that gross social disorder which goes by the popular name of Hinduism, from the perspective of a Dalit feminist, is to write on an old enemy, the undeniable oppressor. On a normal day, I would have thought of cognizant and carefully constructed sociological theories, I would have theorized, particularized, contextualized, or to put it the way I see it, presented a reader with an overdose of multi-syllable words that beleaguer understanding. On such an academic-yet-normal day, I would have attempted a clinical depersonalization and completed an article with a multitude of crawling footnotes in crazily small fonts. But today has been different: I woke up and what I got to read were highly distressing interviews with a section of Dalit women in Gujarat who continue to toil as manual scavengers, and carry on their heads what is so evasively called night-soil.

Shit. Yes, I have even said that word now.

It sparked a deluge of emotions, but what I am left with right now is just the awful silence of betrayal. And a bare rawness of expression that wants to scream and shout. It rendered the last of my beliefs hopeless, it exposed that India: so eloquently advertised as India Shining, is in fact an India Stinking.

Today, while India continues to stink and rot, Manu-dharma dictates our daily life (Hindutva has been thrown out of power, though not out of presence) and as designed by the caste system, at the lowest strata of this maniac hierarchy are my sisters, the Dalit women: voiceless and victimized. The Hindutva enclave that chooses to call itself the Sangh Parivar was founded to foster the political and fascist aspirations of the

Aryan upper-caste male—who heads this crude-yet-critical hierarchy—and is the striking anti-thesis of the Dalit women. Hindutva and Dalit women are nothing but contradictory factions, diametrically opposed groups of the maximum oppressor and the most oppressed. And between these extremes there exists a series of elastic hierarchies and segregated oppressions, each so specific and yet so inter-connected.

Before I begin to write of these anti-theses, before we attune our understandings to explore these couple of extremes, we can take a look into the reactionary family of the Sangh Parivar, in order to understand how casteist and feudal arrogance occur and are always coupled with male domination.

Welcome now to the world of women who are stuck in the patriarchy of the Parivar.

The Flimsy Parivar

The Sangh Parivar, as if to incorporate its dissent over birth control, has expanded its family to such proportions that one might possibly avert keeping count. A modest estimate would peg the number of members to a dozen-and-a-half, but let us leave that to the analysts. Because it would not be possible to reprint here the genealogy and origin of how women came to be inducted (indirectly so, in the beginning at least) into the Sangh, here is a concise version: Women were denied membership in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the oldest and core organization of the seven-decade-old Sangh Parivar. It was only in 1936, eleven years after the formation of the RSS was the Rashtriyasevika Samiti born. Women from the families of the RSS members were enrolled in this organization that is modelled as a *dharmapatni* or wife to the male controlling body, the RSS. The Rashtriyasevika Samiti since its days of inception has been exclusivist and maintained a low profile. Like the RSS, its membership comes from upper/middle-level oppressor castes with middle-class income backgrounds.[1]

Now, about its dogma of existence. *Matrishakti* (mother power) is the vainglorious term 'bestowed' on the organization, highlighting that what matters is not womanhood but motherhood: it is no celebration of femininity; instead it is a capitalization of the womb. Matrishakti or these unabashed sets of womb-bearers have their individualized

shakhas, their *bouddhik* (brainstorming) sessions and weapons training: swordplay and such like. Women here are taught that they are different and not equal, an indoctrination that is so entire and consuming that it allows the least space for what contemporary feminist theories aim at. The Samiti, being the *dharmapatni* or wife it was meant to be, sticks faithfully to 'Guruji' Golwalkar's dictum—'Disparity is an indivisible part of nature, we should live with it. Harmony and not equality should be the organizing principle of society'—a devious statement that is at once anti-Dalit and anti-women. Or as is the case: entirely anti-Dalit women. Understand the temerity of this regressive Sangh when it says that we should live with disparity. And the reason that Golwalkar professes? Because disparity is a part of nature. Part of whose nature, Mr.Golwalkar: yours, the oppressor caste Aryan males', or is this the bunch of thoughts that was transferred to you? And could any khaki short-sporting swayamsevak come forth to answer as to why *we* should live with it?

The Sangh Parivar's ideology is nothing new; there is nothing ground-breaking or earth-shattering in all the saffron claptrap that is so ceremoniously written and ritually propagandized. It is a repeated rendering of the *Manusmriti*: in its entirety, or sometimes, in bits and parts. The evidence is for all to see: in the casteism that is the nerve-centre, in the obsession over women's sexualities; in the stress on divinely ordained disparity, in the imposition of a you-we-all-should-live-with-it code. Not always is Manu acknowledged though; two-thousand-year old traditions have fallen out of copyright but, devastatingly, not out of practice. Golwalkar—famous for his theory that present day Bihar and Orissa were part of the Arctic region where the Aryans originated and that while the region shifted but not the Aryans—said of Manu that he was the greatest law-maker of mankind, not only for his time, but for all the times to come. The metamorphosis from the *Manusmriti* has been swift: only it has been moulded a little here and there, possibly to enact it in a post-colonial world, to carefully preserve all the self-indulgent inequalities in an era of egalitarianism.

When the Sangh Parivar so blatantly derecognizes the democratic need for equality, we understand not only its fascist mindset, but also its fundamental craving to preserve the coziness of hierarchy. Viewed in this manner, it becomes clear why the Parivar does not stress on the need for corrective discrimination to the historically disadvantaged

and subjugated sections of society. It is exactly this kind of brainwashing that Brahmin and neo-Brahmin women of the Sangh learn, and this prevents them from challenging the manipulation of their sexualities and from contesting existing power-relationships within their own limited circles. To understand the fundamentalist essence of the Sangh Parivar, we need to look at their aspects on topics pertaining to gender in the light of John Stratton Hawley's argument that 'fundamentalist perspectives on gender cast a uniquely revealing light on the nature of fundamentalism as a whole'.[2] Sample this excerpt from *Our Women,* a Hindutva tract that liberally quotes Swami Vivekananda on women: 'Chastity is the life of a nation. Do you not find in history that the first death-sign of a nation has been unchastity? When that has entered, the end of a race is in sight.'[3] The Sangh not only makes it mandatory for women to remain chaste, but also links their unchastity with the ruin of a nation, the end of race. So, the intention does not merely end with the attempt to bulldoze women into chastity. It goes further into blackmail. And to buttress this strangulating male-domination, history is also roped in.

For the Samiti, history is a hand-me-down. Women here, like the oppressed caste male members of the Sangh, are taught that their 'low' and 'pitiable' status is because of the invasions that took place on the nation. This most eloquent conspiracy, the pathetic externalization of the problem is the attempts of importing imagined *videshis* (foreigners) to absolve the bigotry of the *swadeshi* (Indian) caste and patriarchal structures. This externalization makes it easier for them to portray Muslim men in very derogatory shades and it ensures that they become the objects of hate for the Hindus.

Endogamy

The same people who say in the open: 'Hindu girls beware of Muslim men' in order to 'protect their women' from 'other' men and the ensuing possibility of inter-religious marriages, have no different stands when it comes to caste. Only caste is talked about in a closeted manner in the privacy of the saffron homes. Given the Parivar's deliberate silence on caste, another angle in which we can understand the stand of the Sangh on caste 'purity' is by learning its stand on racial purity. Golwalkar exalted the Nazi anti-Semitism and wrote:

> 'To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races, the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.[4]

Substitute race by religion, and race by caste, and you will know the lesson that Golwalkar wanted everyone to learn, on the importance and pride and purity of maintaining exclusivity and homogeneity. There are many, many stories that have been propagated by the Sangh decrying Hindu-Muslim unions, more specifically, Hindu women marrying Muslim men. In this attempt, Muslim men have been depicted not only as ultra-masculine, but also as agents acting on petrodollars, and as seducers of kafir women. The Sangh Parivar is vocal on this inter-mixing in marriages (and consequently progeny) only when it comes to Muslims, who are easily portrayed as foreigners; it is silent when it comes to caste.

In the perverted Parivar lobby, what applies for Muslim men and Hindu women, will it not apply for Dalit men and Brahmin women too? What would be the silent diktat on inter-caste marriages? Will this not be applied to castes too, especially because caste-identities in India are as concrete as religious identities? To consolidate the larger Hindu identity, the Parivar indulges in the projection of Muslim men as the Other. For the firmer (and banally secret) construction of jati and caste identities, there goes on the projection of you-know-who as the Other.

Was it not the very same Hindu nationalism that fiercely opposed early attempts to legalize inter-caste marriages on the grounds that it would spoil the honour of families and lead to a mushrooming of half-castes? Is this also not one of the major reasons why an almost maniac obsession over the chastity of Hindu women is maintained? It was this burgeoning importance accorded to the chastity of women that could ensure the continuation of the caste system for over 2000 years. Listen to this same concept packaged in the words of the Sangh Parivar. In *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations*, Shriram Sathe writes

'One is often astonished at the continuing stability of Hindu homes in spite of the most trying circumstances over the last one thousand years of endless struggle, first against the Islamic and later against the British invaders. But one cannot understand *the secret of this immortality of the Hindu home unless one realizes the vital role of women in the entire Hindu social structure.'*[5] Along with stressing on the fundamentalist concept of home-is-where-the-woman-is, side by side, the author also places the 'vital role' of women in the entire Hindu social structure and holds them responsible for the secret of immortality of the Hindu home. This is the precise reason why the Sangh Parivar, with its view to safeguard the Hindu social structure (read caste system), lavishes enormous importance to the chastity of women and the purity of homes.

Dr. Ambedkar also hinted at the crucial role of women in the Hindu caste system when he said that 'women are the gateways to the caste-system' and that the closed nature of the caste system is maintained through the sexual exploitation of women. This was why he said that the annihilation of Untouchability was more an issue for women than for men. It was in this context that he defined the absence of inter-caste marriage to be the one characteristic that can be called the essence of castes.

Endogamy, the system of marriage within the caste/sub-caste/gotra has been the preserver of the caste system. On the other hand, exogamy (inter-caste marriage) destroys the very foundations of this caste structure. What is the Sangh's stand here? How many times has this been debated in shakas? How any times has it been condemned in the bouddhik sessions? Why is there a political silence on inter-caste marriages? The nearest the Sangh has ever got to tackling the caste problem is by saying, 'Let us *forget* caste'. Note the keyword: 'forget'; as though it were temporary amnesia. And, above all, a cheap-trashy-temporary forgetting, unlike what Ambedkar said: Annihilate caste. If the Sangh Parivar chooses to refute the view that it is casteist, let it release its white paper on inter-caste marriages within the members of the Parivar. Inter-caste, as in Dalit-Upper Caste, Dalit-Backward Caste. Not the ludicrous story of a Tamil Iyengar and a Madhava Brahmin; not some steamy one about a Shastri and a Chitpavan Brahmin. But is there any history of the Sangh having endorsed inter-caste marriages? For an organization that has the mobilization capacity of heaping lakhs of

kar-sevaks at one place, of holding massive anti-minority hate-rallies, would it be difficult to conduct at least a hundred inter-caste marriages? And when I am speaking of inter-caste marriages, I do not even insist on Periyar's self-respect form of marriage that entirely removed the role of Brahmin priests from the marriage ceremony. Press the pause button there, please. Call in all your sants, sanyasis and sevaks if you need. But how about some transgression of caste for once, say, marrying Dalit men to your women. Or, vice versa. Sounds basic and elementary all right, but a change that could demolish the very basis of casteism. And the good news would be: it might create a change from this monotony of impossibly impaired inbreds, of weak bodies and weaker whatevers.

Dichotomy in approach

The Sangh Parivar is not only adept at inaction as in the case of inter-caste marriages, but is also remarkable for its dichotomous approach in a wide range of issues. For an organization that mouths incredible propaganda about *Akhand Bharat* and national integration, what has it done for the divided Indians that exist on caste and outcaste lines: as villages and Dalit ghettos that are spatially apart and compulsorily segregated? Only the maps have not been prepared but of what use are imaginary lines anyway? Has it ever stood up to challenge this religiously imposed cessation that makes it mandatory for Dalits to live out of the villages? What has the Sangh, which continues to trounce and denounce Jinnah's two-nation theory that created Pakistan, done for the integration of the two distinct Indias: the 'caste-Hindu'stan, and the outcaste India?

Saffron agendas and manifestos have a two-pronged approach of action and inaction. Take for instance, the Parivar's boast of having a background of sending its volunteers to help and intervene in tragic and disastrous events. But why are they missing when the Dalit colonies burn? How many atrocities on Dalits have they condemned? How many crushed Dalit lives have they rehabilitated? I have not seen the least shade of saffron during any event of Dalit distress, but I still put forth these questions. I am asking these questions not because I seek convoluted answers. I am well aware of what happens to those who dare to question. And, I have been through the hate-mail series too, so,

fine, thank you. I am asking this because every time we talk of caste we address only the Dalits and as Ambedkar pointed out, people do not question the touchables for the caste system.

Further, what would happen if we apply the Parivar's principles unto itself? The Sangh justifies the breaking down of mosques and churches and constructing new temples there on the ground that it is 'correcting history'. Can the oppressor-caste ridden Sangh or for that matter this 'caste-Hindu'stan itself survive if Dalits and other oppressed sections decided that they too wanted to correct history and settle scores? What would be the state of affairs if every massacre and carnage that was perpetrated on caste lines was returned back dutifully? If it is corrective history to demolish a centuries-old mosque based on the belief that there existed a temple; is it not justifiable if reverse and compulsory reservation be granted to Brahmins in 'taboo' areas like manual scavenging as a part of the same corrective history? After all, these ideas are just an extension of the Sangh Parivar's. Talking of positive discrimination, the flashbacks of the Hindutva orchestrated agitations against the implementation of the Mandal Commission's Recommendations immediately come to mind. But the seeds of that 'revolt' were sowed decades ago when Golwalkar impishly wrote in his *Bunch of Thoughts*: 'Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for "Scheduled Castes" for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interest in them in remaining as a separate entity'.[6] Today, or on any other day in the future, can the Sangh Parivar come publicly and reissue or re-quote what its 'Guruji' had said. Can it dare to impudently repeat that the continuation of positive discrimination would create vested interests among Dalits and alienate them as a separate entity? The policies of the Parivar are most often, strictly, for private and internal circulation. The faces that the Sangh reveals in the open are mere masks; but beneath these fancy masks, there hides the dreadful oppressor caste patriarchy of the Orange order.

Let me go back and concentrate on only women-related themes. A telling example of its dual tactics came to light when the Sangh imposed its barbaric dress codes and coordinated an unbearable hullabaloo in Delhi saying that girls should not wear short skirts because it would expose them, among other things, to mosquito bites. If I am

inclined to argue, I might wonder why an organization, whose male members wear khaki shorts as the uniform, have great worries when it comes to the attire of women. What prevents me from probing more on that count is the fact that I have larger concerns, greater responsibilities. Several of my activist-friends, most of them Dalit women, have told me that up to the 1980s, in some areas in southern Tamil Nadu, Dalit women were not allowed to wear blouses/upper-garments. That was the caste-Hindu diktat. Exposure now, was not an issue of liberty, it was an imposition. Where was the Sangh then? What happened to its cherished ideal of dear old modesty? After all, when the Sangh could find the blind rage to adamantly criticize dressing down, it could have well-nigh opened its eyes and spent a little of its energies in dressing-up.

On a larger canvas, two major legislatory measures defined the year 2003: the repeated defeat of the Women's Bill and the attempt to bring in a Uniform Civil Code. While the Parivar's stand on the Women's Bill was all too evidently against the marginalized sections, its position on the Uniform Civil Code needs a lot of analysis. Mridula Sinha, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Mahila Morcha leader wrote: 'It is a tragedy that in the eyes of the law, the concept of Indian womanhood is non-existent. There are Hindu women, Muslim women, and Christian women.' She proceeded to argue, 'The emancipation of Indian women will remain a far off cry as long as a Uniform Civil Code is not passed.'[7] The issue of the Uniform Civil Code—like the feminist issue of discrimination against Muslim Women—has been hijacked by the Hindu Right. While it is certainly regrettable that minority women suffer for lack of reform in their personal codes, it is downright condemnable that Hindutva forces emerge as their unwelcome spokespersons. The politics of supremacy has ensured that under the guise of bringing about equality in the personal codes, there could be a blatant imposition of Hindu norms and practices on the minority communities. Paradoxically, equality would correspond to subordination and enslavement. The politics surrounding Sinha's yearning for a unified identity of Indian women is understandable. But why do the members of the Sangh Parivar not realize that Indian women move and mix not only along their religious identities but along their caste identities as well. Now that all religions have ingrained their versions of the caste system, why could not the Mahila Morcha

bother about abolishing caste? Would it not have given all women an entirely Indian women identity?

The sanitized Sangh Parivar, despite its obsession and maniac control over women's sexualities, projects the view that sex is supposedly a taboo and thereby prevents all discussions taking place in its name. Within the Parivar precincts, it remains an unutterable word. This intolerance can extend to enormous proportions, as witnessed by the nation during the screening of the movies *Fire* and *Water*, when vandals of the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal ensured that no one had the right to explore these themes.

Saffron on Screens

The Sangh Parivar displays such an extent of hooliganism and reactionary attitudes towards counter cultures. And, yet, for the Saffron Brigade, mass media has become yet another route to a recruitment drive. In its obsessive endeavour to present the nation as a mother(land) that needs to be 'protected,' the Sangh Parivar lays a great insistence on the concepts of 'security' and 'honour.' This is visible not only in the spew of nuclear tests and rocket launches and warships and military parades and other choreographed extravaganzas, but also in the sudden spate of war-films that have been released during the five-year term of the BJP.

Agreed: Bollywood's obsession is with profit, not propaganda. Firstly, let us take a look at the numbers. There are only four major war-films that Bollywood churned out in a span of over two decades: Chetan Anand's *Haqeeqat* (1964; following the 1962 war with China) and *Hindustan ki Kasam* (1973; following the 1971 war with Pakistan on the issue of Bangladesh), Manoj Kumar's *Upkar* (1965; after the Indo-Pak war) and Ramanand Sagar's *Lalkaar*. But in a post-BJP-in-power India, the number of war-films getting released has been growing exponentially. In my limited knowledge there has been Anil Sharma's *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha,* its sequel *Hero* (both of them filled with Pakistan-bashing), *Sarfarosh* with its ISI agent, *Pukar* with its anti-Pakistan slogans and finally J. P. Dutta's *Refugee, Border* and *LOC-Kargil*. Film historians could perhaps shed light on why the release of so many Bollywood war-films has overlapped with the increasingly militant posturing of the Hindutva brigade. While critics have suggested that

patriotism was the last resort of the scoundrel, one gets to feel that either the industry is taking its dictates from somewhere, or, in its seemingly typical innocence, capitalizing on the prevailing sentiments of tear-jerking, chest-thumping nationalism to rake in the moolah and ensure good Fridays. Whatever the reason behind this, it has helped the Sangh Parivar to take advantage of the medium of cinema to perpetuate its favourite stereotype: the Other (here, the Muslim male) under the guise of lambasting Pakistan. Even the Pakistani foreign minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri had expressed his displeasure over Bollywood's war movies. As these films sublimate and divert all hatred towards a particular and well-defined enemy, the vast majority of the viewers are indoctrinated subconsciously; not only do they lose attention in the pressing issues that need to be challenged but also they become transformed 'patriots' whose potential for violence can be tapped with a next call to arms.

And then there is the second type of films that finds favour with the right wing. These films shot in picturesque locales, with captivating lavish weddings and large bungalows, are modelled after the perfect Hindu family. Such movies, usually produced with enormous budgets, encourage a palpable nationalistic sentiment coupled with an extravagant consumerist culture. Add the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) phenomenon to this saffron picture, and then you could understand why the Parivar is floating in its feel-good factor. For NRIs, the need for a distinct, ethnic cultural identity makes them go hoo-ha about *anushasan* (discipline) and *parampara* (tradition) and *sanskriti* (culture) and the whole Hindutva boogie-woogie that they get to see on the silver screen. In their yearning to Be Indian, they are led to Being Hindu. Actress Nandita Das, in an interview with *Nukkad*, explains this concept:

> 'In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* where a girl who is very modern, wearing short skirts, etc., when asked to sing a song in Hindi sings "Om jai jagadish hare". This has an appeal in London and in Jhummri Talayya. The NRI phenomenon is scary. I have travelled with my films *Fire*, *Earth* and *Bavandar* to places where I met NRIs. I had a very interesting discussion with some top doctors of London. They feel rooted and said their nationalistic feeling was stronger. I asked them what they wanted to do

> for their country. They said they wanted to propagate Hinduism. And though we were talking about India. I think this juxtaposition of Hinduism for Indian is the most scary thing.'

Sadly, this juxtaposition keeps going on and on. In between this filmi masala, the Sangh Parivar goes lamenting about the predominance of 'Khans' (read Shahrukh, Salman and Aamir) as heroes. Some other Hindu actor meanwhile gets endorsed by the RSS as the Hindu hero who shall put an end to the 'Khan' culture. Contrast all this mischievous and high-energy behaviour of the Sangh with its delay in even releasing in theatres all over the nation a film on Ambedkar directed by Jabbar Patel. All these days, the film sat gathering dust (it was released only in Maharashtra). On the eve of the polls, it is picked up and dusted and plans are made for its screening across India. No prizes for guessing why; Dalit votes remain to be sentimental, take-it-for-granted affairs.

If this is the manner in which saffron has permeated Bollywood, then its perpetuation into the small screen is no small matter, either. In this vast nation of 61 million TV sets, soap operas have an extremely high potential for outreach. The most classic instance of the power of television came to be seen with the screening of Ramanand Sagar's serial *Ramayana* on Doordarshan. *Ramayana* served as a quintessential precursor to the Ramajanmbhoomi movement. First, it transformed the *Maryada Purush* (so far beheld only in imagination) into a living, breathing man. Gradually, the whole monkey-army nonsense and kitschy valour that characterized *Ramayana* were tapped by the Hindutva forces to represent Hindu militancy. The serial gave fruit to the dreams of a puritanical golden age set in a patriarchal, patrimonial state.[8] This was followed by other productions like *Mahabharata, Jai Vir Hanuman,* and *Om Namah Shivaih*.

Hindu nationalism has emerged successfully in politics because of its careful machinations and permeations into the public culture. For the Sangh Parivar, media mobilization and tapping all those with the 'right sentiment' has increased its conditions of growth. Now, daily, spread across many, many TV channels there continue to be screened the soap operas that hard-sell Hindutva. Marketed over satellite beams and dish antennas, the Parivar has ensured that there is a round-the-clock celebration of caste-Hindu patriarchy. If devotional or religious-

themed serials end up magnetically attracting the first-level of people who are vulnerable to the Hindutva cultural onslaught, the second-tier people shall be glued into the current Hindi (and of course, similar regional language) serials like *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* or another in that ilk which propagates patriarchal concepts.

Packed to capacity with the height of oppressor caste, exploiter class consumerism—these serials and soap operas also prominently place importance on conservative culture, pit women against women, and yet, within their capacity encourage 'filmy' lifestyles where the only thing the men are capable of are extramarital affairs. The situation in the Tamil context is no different; in fact, one of the top-rated serials provided an elaborate and complacent justification of bigamy. Further, women in these serials depict a petty bourgeoisie lifestyle; and at their best speak the Brahmin dialect, and portray brahminical cultures and superstitions. The soap operas present a noteworthy situation because in the life depicted on the small screen, the caste issues and class struggles are not just brushed to the margins, but even brushed away entirely.

We have to understand the profound cultural impact of such soap operas on Dalits and other marginalized sections. Through such media of dissemination, the brahminical patriarchy shall only uphold its culture. While the stress is on tradition, there is a silent and indirect stress on caste. Besides, the serials present skewed worldviews to the Dalits, apart from encouraging conservative and consumerist cultures. Already, the blatant cultural invasions of the Sangh Parivar itself have been cause for worry. There have been documented instances of tribal and Dalit women in areas like Gujarat and Jharkhand who have been forced by the Hindutva forces to wear mangalsutras and *sindoor* as symbols of marriage. Now, when cultural invasion flows from the visual media, the conquering seems complete.

Contesting Beauty and the Hindutva Hysteria

On the one hand, the Sangh Parivar, directly and indirectly, engages in the glorification of brahminical traditions and imposes the same on Dalit and other oppressed caste women. Traditional feminists might like to skim over the threats of Hindu majoritarianism to Dalit women. However, it would also be worthwhile if they understood that gendered

oppression has other shades as well, including caste, class and ethnicity. Besides, one has to understand that feminism in India has been fostered with protectionist discourses and conservative ideologies: a direct fallout of the patriarchal Hindu revivalism that formed a portion of opposition to the Raj. In this context, the increasing importance of a radical Dalit feminist approach for our times becomes all too evident. And the urgency for this approach is necessitated because Hindutva is a force that is potent enough to reverse all that the women's movement has achieved in India. When the BJP was the ruling government (until the 2004 General Elections when it was routed from power) it had planned to rename the Women Studies Centres across the nation as Family Studies Centres; substitution of the word 'women' with the word 'family' shows the grotesque patriarchal aims of the Parivar to convert and convolute the agenda of Women Studies.

Also, for some time now, feminist-scholars like Indu Agnihotri have been worriedly pointing out about the appropriation of the terminology of the feminist movement by the Sangh Parivar.[9] This has been further enunciated by researchers debating on the protest against the beauty contests: which in many ways won a great deal of media publicity for the Sangh's women chapters. In the protest against the Miss World contest held at Bangalore in 1996, the Left and the Right wings become mutually embarrassed and thrown-together allies, each opposing the same issue on different stands. The Sangh's massive hysteria against high-flying fashion and beauty contests stems from its need to resist western cultural imperialism. For the Sangh understands things in terms of tradition and Indian culture, versus modernity and Western culture. Further, at no point of time does the Sangh seek to criticize the economic imperialism that is entwined with such a cultural imperialism. Moreover, the Sangh Parivar which opposes Western cultural imperialism that is being thrust on India has no qualms about being a cultural imperialist by itself. These can be viewed from the cultural policing that its various organizations indulge in.

Vandalism on St. Valentine's Day

The St. Valentine's Day celebrations have been a major target of the right wing. This year, not just stopping with attacking shops in its customary style, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bhopal also vowed to

blacken the faces of couples with soot if they celebrate what is known as Lover's Day in India. True, there is a 1500 crore industry subsisting on the celebrations surrounding Valentine's Day. And, it is widely agreed that blowing up Lover's Day is a major marketing strategy: but that's the Left argument. The sad thing is that Hindutva forces use the very same premise of Valentine's Day to spread their ideology, not by the traditional celebration, but by providing a fierce resistance in the form of continued, malicious propaganda, moral policing and uncalled-for agitation. Firstly what gets challenged is Lover's Day. Then, Love. Slowly, what they aim to put a full stop to is love marriages. More specifically, inter-caste, inter-religious, love marriages. It is this bunch of culture police and macho vandals of the Sangh who ensure that Valentine's Day does not get celebrated. In Tamil Nadu, RSS weekly magazines extol that celebrating Valentine's Day is not part of Indian culture.

And there is the second level of argument that Love is divine. So, dear reader, it is out of bounds of you, and me, and the women and the men on the street. Divine, as enjoyed by the Devas. Love, as mandated by the Hindutva. Love, as chronicled by Kamban and Kalidas (and no, let us all maintain a steady silence on the *Kamasutra* anyway). Love is given a lucid redefinition and our nation gets to be straitjacketed as the land that knew of such examples of divine love as Mira and Andal. So there, over to one-sided unattainable love over non-existent playboy gods. Teenage girls shall strut around singing Krishna, Krishna. And if your first impulse over your daughter's obsession with a charming god is any problem, don't fret. Blame it on '*Bharateeya Sanskriti*': force-fed and fundamentalist.

My obvious squirming over the Sangh Parivar's attack on Valentine's Day is not out of place. I am not bothered about the removal of a Western cultural influence as much I am bothered about what the Hindutva chooses to substitute in its place. It is this substitution, rather this chauvinistic retrieval of a culture of patriarchy and casteist hegemony that shakes the ground beneath our feet.

In the typical style of the Sangh Parivar, there is this idea of a compromise floating around. An article in the latest issue of *Vijaya Bharatam*, an RSS weekly magazine in Tamil, after rehashing and re-insisting on the stand that love comes after marriage, and that love is a

mutual feeling between a man and woman of similar backgrounds (there, that's caste and class ensured in a nutshell), suggested that there could be an alternative date for celebrating Lover's Day: and this date, should be from the Hindu calendar because the Christian traditions associated with Valentine's Day were not fit. And this alternative day was to fall on *Panguni Uthiram* (in the final month of the Tamil calendar: falls sometime in mid-April) when all the god couples married, who included the famous Murugan and Valli, Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita, Shiva and Parvathi, and so on. And the command was that couples in love could celebrate at temples by praying to god. All this clearly reflects on the Brahmin paradigm: assimilate what you cannot annihilate.

Hindu Nari

The Sangh Parivar, apart from giving its timely sound-bites on conforming to control in view of a good society, also stresses on a code for how Hindu women should live. The manipulations of the Hindutva forces mandate that the Hindu woman must be chaste for ever and ever. Chastity translates into life-long monogamy. Indirectly the Parivar members attack the concept of widow remarriage on the ground that the Hindu union, that is, the affirmation and the solemnization of marriage is a pact made not just for a lifetime, but for seven births. For these desi Nazis, sati is about the virtuous wife's enduring love for her husband. (Alas, there is no corresponding ritual in which virtuous men with enduring love for their wives climb into the funeral pyres of their wives.) At one point of time, a prominent woman of the saffron order, Vijayaraje Scindia exalted sati as 'our cultural heritage'. With the Parivar working overtime and the judiciary acquitting those accused in the historical Roop Kunwar sati episode; it might not be surprising if few years down the line, the Sangh might put back sati into practice.

Now that the Hindutva force has female faces on its leaders' list does not dilute the fact that the Sangh Parivar is an anti-women, casteist, patriarchal organization. One has to recall that the saffron-clad sanyasin Uma Bharti, the former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, had to publicly proclaim her chastity when there were rumours floating around which alleged that she had an affair with a colleague in the Parivar. The

burden of proof is on the women, and like the trembling Sita in the *Ramayana*, it is the woman who has to prove chastity, it is the woman who has to undergo the *agnipariksha* or ordeal by fire. Although women of the Parivar have been prominently placed in the public sphere and also serve as kar-sevikas and members of semi-militant factions of the Parivar, like the Durga Vahini, they are all made to conform to the stereotype of the Hindu Woman. No matter what their positions of power, the women of the Sangh are only instruments of upper caste patriarchy.

The Sangh on Patriarchy: Oh, well, that is no problem . . .

The problem of patriarchy and male domination is never tackled within the Sangh Parivar. By refusing to acknowledge even the very existence of the problem, the Hindutva forces succeed in totally ignoring the need for feminism. Tanika Sarkar brilliantly summarizes the construction of the Sangh's concept of motherland vis-à-vis its stands on caste and class. She writes:

> Internal divisions of class and caste are seen as forms of divisiveness that desecrate the wholeness of the *desh*. These divisions, therefore, are not to be interrogated but submerged under a political piety that suspends all manner of criticism which might expose social hierarchies. Such criticisms, whenever encountered, elide into the metaphor of a divided and mutilated yet sacred body which is to be reconstructed as non-stratified so that it can continue singular and integrated. The sacrality of an integrated and aggressive yet perpetually threatened female body is the organizing principle that holds the edifice together. The argument loses its power, its charge, if the country is allowed to be seen as a piece of land with flesh-and-blood people living within it. The power of this vision is further undone if the mystical description of people as soldiers in a holy war lapses into one in which they are social beings with very real social problems. Rithambara warns untouchable Dalits against violating the sacred unity of Hindus by the lure ('candy') of the Mandal issue. The problems of territo-

> rial diversity and social division require endless transcendence; a reply on many registers of the long history of past mutilations and desecrations of an inviolable, sacred body. The loss of Ramjanmabhoomi, Partition, Hindu disunity, lower-caste protest—all these are ranged together as enactments of the same terrible sin.[10]

Note here that the internal divisions of caste and class are seen in contemporary Hindutva theology as divisiveness, whereas the largest problem—of gender as the basis of subjugation—is easily given the go-by. As a further elaboration of Sarkar's thesis I feel that it has to be also observed that there is a questionable silence on the issue of feminism, and of women uprising against patriarchy. The Sangh Parivar doesn't even mention this, because unlike other hierarchies that might come under challenge, the saffron brigade deems that this patriarchy must always remain status quo; and that the supremacy of men must never be challenged. All the while their call to arms is built around the nation as a 'perpetually threatened female body' metaphor, and yet the problems of womankind do not seem to press the Parivar. A careful comprehension of the Parivar's approach highlights their perspective that Ramjanmbhoomi *should not* have been lost, Partition *should not* have taken place, Hindus *should not* be non-unified, 'lower' castes *should not* protest. Yet, when it comes to the question of the women's struggle, they exhibit the mindset that women *should not* rebel against patriarchy. By theoretically setting women on unreachably high pedestals and portraying them as worshipful mothers, the question of gendered oppression and sexual exploitation is never addressed.

Unutterables and the Untouchables

The conspiracy of silence that the Sangh Parivar maintains on casteist atrocities of sexual violence needs special mention. Rape, so commonly used in the context of Dalit women, becomes a tragedy of disgrace and defilement where the 'honour' of 'upper' caste women is concerned. In order to avert 'their' [read 'upper' caste] women from becoming victims they are empowered with self-defence techniques. And even in these seemingly open-and-shut decrees, casteism remains.

Take the case of self-defence techniques and weapon's training imparted to oppressor caste women within the Parivar, whereas in reality, the women who need these the most are the Dalit women. Why is it so wary in doing anything for the Dalit women? Beliefs about rape being an 'outrage of modesty' and 'loss of honour' are not liberatory feminist but protectionist discourses. When the Sangh says it is a (upper-caste) woman's modesty being outraged they indirectly speak from the pedestal of the Hindu patriarch.

Women in the Sangh are also constantly fed the patriarchal notions about purity, chastity and related bunkum. A glaring example of this inane brainwashing is in the examples that the Sangh glorifies; of women who committed suicide because they were raped and of women who committed suicide because they would be raped (*jauhar*). Publications of the Sangh Parivar paint halos for incidents of jauhar. Sometimes, their exaggeration reaches unimaginable levels: the book *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*,[11] cites more than a dozen instances of mass self-immolations of women who killed themselves to 'save their honour.' While one of the earliest reported 'incidents' details the mass immolation of 107 women,[12] other 'incidents' include stories of women consuming poison, and women being willingly beheaded by their kinsmen in order not to be 'dishonored by beasts in human form'[13] or in some cases, the heads of 28 girls being broken with bricks to save them from dishonour[14] or 1700 women in Rajouri taking poison that the Swayamsevaks distributed in packets on Diwali day.[15] These are lauded: 'Has any country in the world been able to present examples of such stern calls of honour?'[16] and 'The history of Jauhar of Chittor was repeated, A glorious history of self-sacrifice was created.'[17]

By this covert propaganda and constant glorification of such women does the Parivar intend to suggest that suicide is the solution to being raped? When the premium on chastity for women is exaggerated to such limits, what is the practical solution that the Sangh Parivar gives to Dalit women (who form the greatest percentage of the women subjected to sexual atrocities)? Do not these stories that epitomize women who committed suicide following rape, silently show contempt on the lakhs of women who continue to live post-trauma? Significantly, while Dalit women increasingly become victims of violation, subordination and exploitation the Sangh Parivar continues to maintain its deafening silence on issues of gender, caste and class.

PHULE—PERIYAR—AMBEDKAR

To gain an understanding of how extremely casteist and anti-women the Parivar is, one has to compare and contrast its silence and shoddiness on Dalit and women issues with the vehement and strong actions of revolutionaries like Phule, Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar. All these three stalwarts believed in liberating women to put an end to the caste system. Mahatma Jotirao Phule championed the movement for the education of Shudra and Ati-Shudra women and men for he believed that it had immense emancipatory potential. He was firm in his view of challenging caste and gender issues simultaneously, because only that would lead to an egalitarian society. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement was not only a fierce anti-caste proponent and rationalist, but he was also one of the foremost radical leaders who took up the matter of women liberation with vigour unparalleled in Indian history. He lashed out that 'if slavery has to be abolished in society, the male arrogance and wickedness which leads to the enslavement of women must be abolished first.' He emphasized that 'only when this was achieved, the tender sprouts of freedom and equality would register growth.'[18]

In the same manner, Babasaheb Ambedkar, messiah of the millions of Dalits, declared that castes continued to be maintained through the sexual exploitation of women; and therefore, as mentioned earlier, women were gateways to the caste system. According to Ambedkar, the control on women's sexuality could alone ensure that the closed character of the caste system would be maintained. In his early years, he burnt the *Manusmriti*, not only because this codification of crude laws was anti-Dalit, but also because it was anti-women. Incidentally, it is a matter to rejoice that the Indian Association for Women's Studies have started to celebrate *Manusmriti Dahan Divas* (25 December; the day on which Ambedkar burnt the *Manusmriti*) as the *Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas.* Ambedkar repeatedly laid stress on the fact that the lower the position of the woman in the hierarchy the more intense her exploitation: a statement that serves as the foundation for the necessity of Dalit feminism. His resignation from the post of independent India's first Union Law Minister, because the Hindu Code Bill that challenged casteist patriarchal laws was not passed, is one of the defining movements in the history of the struggle against brahminical patriarchy.

Moreover, another common thread running through all their challenge to Hindutva is that they vehemently attacked its major icon, Ram. In the hands of Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar, the character of Ram was exposed; he was portrayed as the original anti-Dalit, anti-shudra, and anti-women villain. Be it Phule's call for Bali Raj and rereading of the *Ramayana* story, Periyar's counter-epic *Keemayana* and the subsequent holding of Ravana lilas, and Ambedkar's scathing criticism on Ram in the *Riddles of Hinduism*, the publication of which sparked widespread rioting—at no point of time have our leaders failed in revealing the truth about this image of Hindutva. But the Sangh lauds this same Ram, its politics of the Parivar revolve around him, he is their axis, their vote-bank consolidator. This duality of approaches displays the duality of attitudes.

If we go about such a comparison we are faced with a resounding emptiness: the Sangh Parivar's absolute and well-conceived absence of emancipatory ideology relating to Dalits and women. The Parivar's aims are clearly exploitative and smack of the fascist idea of maintaining the subjugation of both Dalits and women. What has the Sangh Parivar done to the Dalits other than imposing the false and oppressive Hindu identity and recruiting them, in large numbers, as foot soldiers against the Muslims? Except that the Sangh 'worshipfully' continues to treat women as bearers of the womb and as begetters of militant sons what is the contribution of the Parivar to Indian womanhood?

Hindutva in Periyar land

If the Sangh Parivar has vigorously worked its way into an Ambedkarite bastion like Maharashtrian Dalits and put forth its *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* campaign—which resembles unfortunately, an ad for a popular detergent—a Hindutvization, that is even more shocking has been taking place in the land of Periyar, Tamil Nadu. The Sangh Parivar which currently uses the religion of the majority as its mobilization potential has no qualms about using caste in the same manner. As long as there is the possibility of a vote-bank involved, one can expect the Sangh to stand at the forefront. Recently, human rights organizations in the state had to work hard to prevent the VHP International general secretary Praveen Togadia from participating in a Thevar (a land-owning OBC oppressor caste in Tamil Nadu) conference in Madurai where he in-

tended to distribute trishuls apart from delivering his customarily hateful speeches. Look at who the natural allies of the Sangh Parivar are: oppressor castes who have a documented history of sexually exploiting Dalit women and have been the cause for a great number of caste clashes in the southern districts in the state.

Or, take for instance one of the most anti-Dalit Hindutva measures of our time: The State Government of Tamil Nadu, ruled by a so-called Dravidian Party, the AIADMK, promulgated the Prohibition of 'Forcible' Religious Conversion Act in October 2002. In theory this Act, enshrined with stringent penalty measures prohibits anyone from 'forcibly' converting Dalits and women; those doing so would be fined up to one lakh rupees and face up to four years of imprisonment. In practice, sections of this law can be twisted to penalize anyone who converts from Hinduism. Leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar declared that the only solution to the problem of Untouchability was to quit the Hindu religion and embrace another religion. As per his declaration, Ambedkar along with millions of his followers converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956. But today, in Tamil Nadu, Hindutva has permeated to the extent that Dalits have even been denied the right to quit the religion that subordinates and oppresses them.

Now, it becomes clear that what is scintillatingly masqueraded as Hindu revivalism is in fact a Hindutva imposition. These anti-conversion legislations of the state governments (Gujarat government followed the Tamil Nadu example), are a bid to keep the Dalits forcefully and legally within the Hindu fold. This is done as a next step to the already existing practice where Dalits lose their reservation benefits when they leave the Hindu religion. Further, patriarchal and tyrannical Hindutva, not being pleased with just restraining Dalits and ensuring the continuation of their slavery; has also taken the diabolical step of clubbing together women. There are chances that sections of this act could be misutilized to prevent Hindu women from marrying those outside their religion and which could transform into a surefire way to guarantee the end of inter-religious love marriages. Thus, it has to be noted that the anti-conversion laws specifically targets not only Dalits, but also women. As a result, one needs to lay emphasis that combatting Hindutva—whose primary aim (as in the ancient times) harbours on the preservation of purity—requires not only a secular and Dalitist/anti-caste approach, but also a feminist understanding.

This consolidation of Hinduism in the state was followed by a government direction that banned animal sacrifice in temples across the state, and therefore paved the way for the brahminization of all the temple rituals. This act of banning of animal sacrifice in temples, removed the non-vegetarian (and consequently, non-Brahmin elements) out of worship. With a single stroke of legislation, the pro-Hindutva government of Tamil Nadu decreed and converted the diet of the gods. Overnight blood-thirsty and malevolent gods and goddesses were forced into becoming timid vegetarians. Maariamma and Karuppu, and a host of village gods could no longer demand roosters and goats. The Madras High Court, to add hunger and insult to injury, suggested that as substitute rituals to animal sacrifice, pumpkin could instead be smashed and lemons be cut. Now, in the anti-Brahmin heartland, there goes on a catastrophic brahminization on the fast track. With the worst ever electoral drubbing in its history, the AIADMK that lost all the forty seats in the 2004 General Elections has withdrawn the anti-conversion and anti-animal slaughter acts, as tempestuously as these were introduced, leaving the BJP high and dry.

In a state known for its rationalist self-respect movement, the rise of the Hindutva forces is due to the degeneracy of the Dravidian movement. The opportunist tendencies of the Dravidian parties have opened the state for an infiltration by Hindutva forces. The percolation of this slow poison is having its consequent effects. As in other states, the Hindutva forces have registered a partial victory, in mobilizing and recruiting Dalits, by making use of the splits and factions within the Dalit movement itself. Here is an example of what Hindutva's divide and rule policy could orchestrate: After the bill banning conversions became law, a Dalit organization based in Chennai planned a campaign tour all over Tamil Nadu to protest against the law and to bring awareness among the Dalits that they were not Hindus at all. Infuriated by this, the very Hindutva forces that were instrumental in bringing about the ban, funded some breakaway faction of Dalits, and this faction, with the 'blessings' of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, embarked on a simultaneous tour propagating to the Dalits that the 'need to return to their *thaimadham* [lit. mother religion]: Hinduism'!

I want also to record another instance that my activist friends and I have been discussing. Hindutva forces in the state, shaken and agitated by Dalit awakening and assertion, have started to undertake counter-

campaigns in all possible ways. Because the Hindutva gang felt that the Tamil Dalit leader Thirumaavalavan's name had found its way on too many walls, it funded opportunist and breakaway Dalits to whitewash those walls and instead inscribe their names there. The climax of this narrative is that these opportunist and ideology-lacking Dalits have been asked to paint '*Swamiji Varugirar*' [lit. the 'Swamiji Is Coming'] on the walls in Dalit localities and ghettos. For centuries, no Shankaracharya has ever ventured into any Dalit ghetto, because it would be 'polluting' to him. Though it is written so, when shall this celibate monk, the Kanchi Shankaracharya, finally come? What the Hindutva has partially succeeded in doing is to exploit every single avenue of encroachment in order to saffronize Dalits. Such political and ideological manipulations of the Dalit movement have their consequent repercussions on the Dalit women too.

The Saffron Patriarchy and Dalit Women

This infiltration of Hindutva into Tamil Nadu—a state renowned for its anti-Brahminism and secular identity—is indescribably dangerous to Dalit women. Patriarchal dominance and caste homogeneity, both of which were implemented by controlling the sexuality of women, is now out on the rampage here. And, for your information, with state-support. It is no longer a closet deal. And that renders it all the more dangerous. Worse, this phenomenon is not restricted to the southernmost state alone. Having conquered the cow-belt and Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Sangh Parivar is slowly making inroads into every available sphere.

The increasing momentum of globalization has only added to the vitalized and alarming spread of Hindutva, which dances the tango with the new economic policies. So, the more aggressive the neo-liberal economic policies, the more aggressive Hindutva forces get. It has to be noted with a lot of anxiety and distress that the processes of economic liberalization, globalization and privatization have all been coincident with the growth and rise of the Hindutva. Dalits supporting misconstrued nirvanas of globalization have got it all wrong. There exist a lot of deeper links, and what appears like a shady twilight frolicking isn't so. Hindutva forces, under their self-imposed Gandhari-like blindfolds need the new rich just as they need the feel-good factor.

And what must be remembered is that both Hindutva and imperialism, behind the masks of their many ideologies, militantly support oppression and exploitation. With relevance to Dalit women, Hindutvization and globalization receive new dimensions because in the world according to the Sangh Parivar there is no category like the female workforce. The Bharat Mazdoor Sangh is an entirely male preserve, anyway. The great bulk of the female labour is in the huge and unorganized informal sector: this has left them devoid of any protection and most severely hit by the vagaries of globalization. This combination of oppressive forces and the protagonists of hierarchy shall only intensify the exploitation and extraction of female labour: a move that shall affect Dalit women to the greatest extent.

While recruitment and enrolment of Dalits as foot soldiers of the Sangh Parivar is taking place in full swing, these same channels are also indoctrinating Dalit women. While it could impose on them new identities, it would also make the Dalits, as a whole, be 'convinced' about caste, about their own outcasteness, and thus render them in a position of perpetual slavery. After all, they would bring in bogus theories of karma here, and incorporate a blame-game where Dalits shall be held responsible for their degraded positions. This way they shall ensure that caste flourishes in this 'karmabhoomi'. Among the Dalit women, this simultaneous imposition and aping of values would corrupt their egalitarian proletarian lives. Dalit women, are now being relegated to the inner spheres. This taming of the shrew, this domestication of Dalit women, robs subaltern society of the very liberty and equality that it possesses. This construction of approved identities of 'subordination', the larger and centralized Hindutva, the saffronization and Sanskritization at work, all form the blueprint that manipulate Dalit lifestyles. For Dalit women, the victims of triple injustices and dual patriarchies, this cast(e)rated encroachment of their cultural avenues causes the sum of net risks due to Hindutva grow exponentially.

The fascist Sangh Parivar's twin agendas, of maintenance of Brahmin supremacy and male domination, culminate in their manipulation of the women's sexuality, a two-in-one project that enables them, as we have seen, to ensure the continuance of both the caste system and patriarchy. While for us, as women, the Hindutva dreams of a sacred thread-sporting hegemonic masculinity come

alive as grotesque nightmares; the Sangh Parivar continues its old invasions, the unfamiliar encroachments. This aggression by her anti-thesis would further subjugate every Dalit woman. The war is now, between her legs.

Notes

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A Caveat: A Kind of Brief Note on the Title

Although it is very clear, I had this nagging feeling that the title was too stark and too direct. Something discreet might have helped, I thought. But later, I was convinced of the aptness of the title when I recently got to read a Hindutva publication called *RSS: A Vision in Action*. In between rabid displays of fascism and repression, fundamentalism and perversion, the 400-odd page book had earmarked five pages for the issues of women, and mostly held information about the Rashtrasevika Samiti. Of the five pages, three were consumed with leggy themes. I have sincerely reproduced here two relevant extracts:

> Here is a telling instance of how even one single vigilant Hindu lady can effectively put an end to certain revolting practices in Christian schools. When a P.E. Teacher of a girls' convent ordered that girls shall thenceforth attend the school wearing skirts (above the knee) the mother of a student—a Sevika of the Samiti, protested against this to the teacher. However when the teacher arrogantly replied that she can take her girl from the school if she did not like her girl to obey the order, the mother took it up as a challenge. The Karyavahika of that Shakha mobilized about 80 mothers of the students and met the Christian principal and bluntly told him that they would not tolerate such insults to the traditional Hindu modesty. They even threatened that in case the order was not withdrawn forthwith, protests by hundreds will follow suit. Evidently, the principal was

> prudent enough and the order was withdrawn. When the principal came to know about the work of the Samiti, he admired the Samiti workers for their organizing capacity at such short notices. (p.173)
>
> On a Raksha Bandhan day, the Jilla Pramukh of the Rashtrasevika Samiti at Sholapur met the District Collector and tied the Rakhi on his wrist. He reciprocated the gesture in the traditional manner by offering her a token amount. But she refused it saying: 'I would rather appreciate your help in the capacity of your high office.' A bit surprised, the Collector asked, 'Do you require employment for any of your relatives?' 'No, no, far from it. I am pained to see the modesty of womanhood being slighted by the manner in which they display the undergarments of women in the cloth-shops. It is so appalling. Kindly do something about it.' That was the first time the Collector had come across an appeal not concerned with any personal benefit. Of course he promised to do whatever was in his power. (p.174)

One of the chief issues is about covering the knees of adolescent girls, and the other is about, hmm, female underwear. This quite sums up something about the 'vision' and the 'action' of the RSS. Now, 'Between Her Legs' doesn't sound anything other than appropriate. Before long, I had a vague feeling of contentment for choosing a title which reflected the position of the Parivar.

1. Tanika Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organization in Hindutva Politics'. In *Secular Challenge to Communal Politics,* edited by P. R. Ram (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 1998): 174.
2. John Stratton Hawley, *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
3. *Our Women* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003).
4. M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur, 1923): 27.
5. Sriram Sathe, *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations* (Hyderabad: Itihasa Sankalan Samiti, Hyderabad, 2003): 76, emphasis mine.
6. Golwalkar, M. S., *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 2000): 356.
7. Mridula Sinha, in *Dashak ke Jharokhe Main* (Delhi: Mahila Morcha, BJP, 1991): 5.

8. Interestingly, the screening of the *Ramayana* on Doordarshan has spawned studies on that phenomenon on a wide scale; some of the more interesting titles include: Ananda Mitra's *Television and Popular Culture in India* (Delhi: Sage, 1993); and Nilanjana Gupta, *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
9. Indu Agnihotri, *Whose Life Is the Sangh Parivar's Adarsh Hindu Ghar Based On: A Comment on Hindutva's Attempts to Appropriate the Vocabulary of the Women's Movement* (Nukkad Janam Samvad, July-December 2001): 32-42. Agnihotri presents her conclusion of how 'the Sangh attempts and achieves a classic doublespeak: it decries the patriarchal mind-set even as it upholds and wishes to strengthen the structures in which patriarchy is rooted in India, both within the family and in society.'
10. Tanika Sarkar, 'Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology'. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).
11. Manik Chandra Vajpayee and Shridhar Paradkar, *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*, trans into English by Sudhakar Raje (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 2002).
12. Ibid: 126-28.
13. Ibid: 164-65.
14. Ibid: 192.
15. Ibid: 298.
16. Ibid: 157.
17. Ibid: 299.
18. *Periyar on Women's Rights*, translated by R. Sundara Raju (Chennai: Emerald Publishers, 1994).

6

Hindutva: Historicity of Dalit Connection

Prakash Louis

In the recent past, there have been greater conflicts and seeming convergence between the right wing Hindutva forces and various segments of the Dalits. On the one hand, Maharashtra produced right wing men who gave birth to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which ultimately grew into the Sangh Parivar (SP),[1] on the other hand, it was also the genesis of one of the staunch critics not only of Hinduism but also of the entire Hindu social order. Maharashtra gave us Mahatma Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and in the post-independence period the Dalit Panther movement as a challenge to the Hindu social order.[2] Interestingly it is in Maharashtra too that a slogan of *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* seems to be gaining grounds (see also Essays 2, 3, 4 and 5). That is, there is an attempt once again by the brahminical forces to rope in the Dalits to become street fighters and vote bank for the Shiv Sena. One could brush this slogan aside saying that this is only a passing phenomenon. But political sociologists would state that if this alliance comes through this could sound serious harm to Dalit assertion and Dalit movements.

During the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, it was regularly reported that the Dalits were 'used' by the Sangh Parivar to engage in violation of the rights of the minority Muslim community (see also Essays 1, 3 and 4). Later, when the Dalit youth went to participate in the festival celebrations they were told 'You are untouchables and you cannot dance with us', and chased away. This was a rude shock to the Dalit youth, who during the Gujarat communal cleansing were mobilized to engage in violence under the scheme of 'Hindu identity'. It is significant to note that this Hindu identity formation was cleverly undertaken without disturbing the caste system.[3] It is this process of subjugation at

times and cooptation at other times which has been the process of interaction between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces.

The lynching of five Dalits in Jhajjar who were engaged in their traditional occupation of skinning dead animals and transporting the hides has once again highlighted the historical antagonism that exists between the Hindu fascist forces and the Dalits. It has been reported that the police, the ones who are supposed to uphold 'law and order' engaged in murderous assault on the Dalits who refused to grease their palms.[4] To hide their crime, the police created the myth that the Dalit youth were killed by the 'Hindutva mob' since they were engaged in skinning a living animal. The killing of the Dalits once again provided the scope and space for the Hindu fascist forces to gain grounds in the region, where they did not have presence in the past (see also Essay 2). In spite of the fact that the Dalit men possessed a valid document to engage in their hereditary occupation they were tortured and murdered. This too goes to state that there are different laws for different caste groups.

The alliance between the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh for the third consecutive time also came under scrutiny.[5] Dalit political activists believe that this alliance has enabled the BSP to move from strength to strength. But there are others who are cautious of the fact that a fascist party like the BJP has found stability in the national political scenario due to the support of the BSP. It is undeniable that the emergence of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh has provided scope and space for Dalit assertion at the political realm. Without any hesitation it can be stated that this has raised aspirations of the Dalits. But whether the political assertion riding on the shoulders of a fascist party would lead to social, economic and cultural liberation of the Dalit masses in Uttar Pradesh remains a crucial question. Thus, the short-term and long-term consequences of these types of political alliances have also come under severe scrutiny.

Another crucial fact is that the Hindutva forces and the Dalits represent two opposing ideologies, ways of life, existence and processes in this country. The Hindutva forces engage in hegemonizing, homogenizing, manipulative, and destructive practices as far as the Dalits are concerned. In contrast, the Dalits are the creative, accommodative, non-owning but producing class. Irrespective of the fact that the Dalits

were and are subjected to unprecedented and unparalleled cruelty and oppression, they continue to uphold Indian polity and society. Whether it is the Chakwara incident where the Dalits were denied the right to enter the village pond (see also Essay 4) or the Jhajjar incident, just mentioned, all seem to reiterate the historical fact that the Dalits can be disposed of by the dominant castes. The most intriguing fact is that the Hindutva forces exploited these incidents to establish their base in these regions.[6]

All these events, processes, historical evolutions and present state of affairs raise questions on the very politics of Dalit assertion. These processes are calling for a deeper understanding of the historicity of the Dalit connection with Hindutva. Though the emergence of the BJP as a political face of the Hindtuva forces is just two decades old and the RSS only seven decades old, there has been interaction between the Hindutva forces and Dalits in terms of the Hindutvization of the Dalits, reducing the Dalits to the most dehumanizing state of Untouchability, depriving them of access to resources, denying them control over livelihood and labour, and so on.

It is these historical and social processes that need to be seriously examined to understand the historical disjuncture that exists between the fascist Hindutva forces and the Dalits. I shall try to identify some of the interactive processes between the Hindutva forces and the Dalits as they unfold. A caveat must be presented here. Since the interaction between the Dalits and the right wing Hindutva forces are historical and contemporary it is not easy to enlist a clear and categorical mode of their operation. One can only identify some broader areas of this disjuncture.

Hindu Fascism: A Hegemonic Ideology

Many social scientists and activists viewed the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 as a watershed in the political makeup of India. Some brushed aside the emergence of fascist Hindutva forces, which were using religion as an electoral weapon, as a passing phenomenon. They made themselves believe that in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like India communalism does not have a future. But they were in for a rude shock when they realized that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was only one aspect of the fascist forces.

Interestingly, the Congress Party, which swears by secularism, was in power at the Centre, which could certainly have thwarted the BJP-game around Ayodhya and saved the Babri Masjid, which then had become a live symbol of secularism. Its failure to do so exposed the fact that all the ruling classes rear fascist aspirations albeit in varying degree. The demolition of the Babri Masjid had clearly signalled the coming of the fascist forces to the centre stage. The introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1991 was also another attempt to open up our markets to predatory global forces and expose our people to their unbridled exploitation. It was again the Congress that initiated these economic policies as it did in the case of Babri Masjid by opening the locks of the Ram Lulla temple in 1980s (see also Essay 2). The BJP, that openly dons the right wing robes and claims ownership of Hindutva, just differs in degree. An examination of major acts and policies enacted by the ruling establishment of this country in the1990s, reiterates this fact that most of them are anti-people in principle and in effect.[7]

The 1996 election manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is the political face of the Sangh Parivar, promised to work 'For a Strong and Prosperous India', spelling out the agenda of the Hindutva forces:

> Hindutva or cultural nationalism shall be the rainbow which will bridge our present to our glorious past and pave the way for an equally glorious future; it will guide the transition from *swarajya,* that is, self-rule to *surajaya,* that is, good-governance . . . Hindutva is a unifying principle, which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation. It is a collective endeavour to protect and re-energize the soul of India, to take us into the next millennium as a strong and prosperous nation.[8]

Though self-rule and good governance are spoken of as desirable ends, the ultimate aim is to build a monolithic, hierarchical and unequal Hindu nation. The spread of Hindu fascist ideology was cleverly crafted with the slogan 'One nation, one culture, one people and one leader'. This is not just a slogan or any catchphrase of a political party; it indicates the hidden agenda of the Hindutva forces. On face value this slogan appears to be a sober attempt by the proponents of 'Hindu Na-

tionalism' to unify various segments of the Indian population. This is also presented as the most urgent business today so that the nation can be saved and protected from some imaginary enemy. The champions of one-nation theory always take recourse to history and warn the citizens that there are 'hostile forces' or to state it in their own words a 'foreign hand'[9] within and outside the country who is all out to destroy national unity and pride. Hence, all should be united to face this threat. In this thought pattern the 'enemy Other' is projected as ready to devour the entire nation, culture, economy and society and thus various segments need to be mobilized to counter this 'threat'.[10]

Here it is expedient to unravel briefly the features of a fascist regime. The divergence between precept and practice is the common feature of all fascist organizations. Having their eye on the seats of power, they try to extend their influence by promising various people various things. The Nazi Party of Germany was nationalist and socialist at the same time. It promised strength to the common man, prosperity to the poor, honour to the German race and thus tried to appeal to every section. Its greatest appeal was to the youth who were attracted by the army discipline, parades and uniform. [11] Similarly, it is by presenting an alternative agenda or ideology that the Sangh Parivar managed to grow from strength to strength.

Sumit Sarkar in his perceptive analysis argues that Fascism had come to power in Italy and Germany through a combination of street violence, carefully orchestrated from above but still undeniably with great mass support, deep infiltration into the police, bureaucracy and army and the connivance of centrist political leaders. Crude violations of laws and constitutional norms consequently had alternated in fascist and Nazi behaviour with loud protestations of respect for legality. Examining the Indian scenario during the post-Babri Masjid demolition riots, he states that there was a combination of street violence with administrative collusion. The fascist forces engaged in communal riots in various parts of Delhi also disrupted the communal harmony initiatives.[12]

According to Jayant Lele, the Hindutva project has three essential characteristics of all its past manipulations: *(i)* it is hegemonic, in the sense that it seeks to create a political constituency that can be regularly mobilized into an ongoing structure of support for electoral and other political activities. The leaders of the BJP in particular know that

the managing institutions of the global economy will actively cooperate with the Hindu nation if and only if it fulfils some basic requirements. These requirements according to Lele are creating and sustaining an internally and regionally stable geo-political order, with a demonstrated superior military-industrial capability compared to its neighbours. *(ii)* The second feature is homogenizing. The political community that emerged under Gandhi and was nurtured by Nehru had taken into account the enormous diversity of the emerging nation that was challenged by the majoritarian Hindu construct. The colonial rulers had nurtured all of these as politically 'equal' interest groups. But from 1980 there was an attempt by the Hindutva forces to create a new hegemony. It aimed at a national consensus based on a homogenized Hindu identity. This is similar to the earlier project of brahminization, that is, of homogenizing the diverse creative and critical impulses in the Indian tradition. *(iii)* Thirdly, the Hindutva forces have followed the pedagogy of recapturing and releasing the power of symbols and deities that have lived this dual, pan-Indian and local existence in the memories and aspirations of the people. This fabrication is aimed at bringing in an illusion of security and trust and a sense of historically persistent solidarity, into a world that is increasingly characterized by anxiety, uncertainty and disorder. The selection and the use of these symbols, events and actors are also associated with pedagogic violence.[13] Thus, in the ultimate analysis, the agenda of Hindutva forces is to continue to maintain the dominance of the caste and class elite. Further, the ascent of Hindutva forces is directly related to fear psychosis of the dominant castes who were threatened by the emergence of the masses that had been subjugated for centuries. Hence, Hindutva forces functioned as the repressive arm of the Indian caste system.

The Hindu social order or the brahminical caste order hitch-hiked on the shoulders of the toiling masses, the Dalits and the downtrodden of this country. As long as these masses bent backwards and provided 'service' to those higher in the caste hierarchy, everything was fine. But the moment, they challenged the skewed social order which provided power, privilege and high position to a few and denied rights to the majority, the resurgence of Hindu nationalism became a war cry. While this process seems to be apparent, the manner in which this reconstruction of Hindu nationalism is undertaken needs careful examination.

Lele goes on to state, 'Once again there is a need to recognize and

yet subdue, if not submerge, diversity. The success of this project is predicated on persuading people to believe in two main premises: *(i)* the anxiety and uncertainty that engulf their lives today is not a highly specific and local manifestations of the global disorder but a product of a conspiracy of subtle and overt enemy forces which have been at work internally, regionally and globally; *(ii)* that these forces have emerged not just in the recent past, but have been active for centuries, and against which the Hindu nation has waged heroic battles through its many heroes'.[14]

Thus, the double-edged agenda of the Hindutva forces has two implications; they have managed to engage in the identity formation of the majority community under a unified 'Hindu fold' and on the other hand these forces have projected the minority religious communities as the enemy Other and have spread conflict and strife. Once conflict and violence spread, they appear on the scene as the sole defenders of majority interests and rights. While this open game goes on, their hidden agenda to uphold the hegemony and monopoly of the brahminical social order gets ratified and strengthened. This is not the end of the story; the fascist forces have also systematically resisted the assertions that emerged from the Dalit, tribal, women, minority and most backward caste communities. Further, it is the congruence between the Brahmins and the Banias or what Phule terms as Bhattji and Shetji or the combination of brain and the business which has usurped religious principles to continue their dominance and superiority.

Historical Disjuncture between the Dalits and Hindutva Forces

There are many social and historical factors which continue to contribute to the antagonism and hatred that exists between these diametrically opposed communities. From the point of view of the Dalits, social mobility has become a reality and there is a leadership demanding restructuring of the social order. Due to this the Dalits no longer lie low and take things as imposed on them but assert their right to be equal citizens. The demand for access to resources and control over labour also has become the agenda of the Dalits. This goes directly against the economic monopoly of the dominant castes who are the central constituency of the Hindutva forces. Moreover, the demand

for social dignity by the Dalits has challenged the till now taken for granted caste order. The attempt to appropriate Dr. Ambedkar has triggered reactions among the Dalits. Above all, there is structural and ideological opposition between the two segments of the Indian population.

The barbaric and beastly behaviour exhibited towards the Dalits and the downtrodden by the dominant castes could be directly understood from the glorification of caste by the proponents of Hindutva. Savarkar's views on caste expresses this in a telling manner.

> And thus we find that the institutions that were the peculiar mark of our nation were revived. The system of four varnas which could not be wiped out even under the Buddhistic sway, grew in popularity to such an extent that kings and emperors felt it a distinction to be called one who established the system of four varnas . . .
>
> Witness the definition that tries to draw a line of demarcation between foreigners and us—The land where the system of four varnas does not exist should be known as the *Mlechcha* [impure] country. Aryavarta lies away from it.[15]

Since Savarkar and his followers are the direct beneficiaries of the inhuman caste system; it is not a surprise that he and the others glorified it, which in turn also provided justification to this social formation. Further, for Savarkar,

> Hindutva embraces all the departments of thoughts and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race . . . the quaint customs and ceremonies and sacraments they involve, observed by some as a religious duty by others as social amenities, impress upon each individual that he can live best only through the common and corporate life of the Hindu race . . . We Hindus are not only a Rashtra, a Jati, but as a consequence of being both, own a common Sanskriti expressed, preserved chiefly and originally through Sanskrit, the real mother tongue of our race. Everyone who is a Hindu inherits this Sanskriti and owes his spiritual being to it as truly as he owes his

> physical one to the land and the blood of his forefathers. A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle of his religion.[16]

Savarkar succeeded in driving home two inter-related points. On the one hand, race, blood, faith, cultural moorings and practices of those persons whose ancestry is beyond the borders of India cannot be part of Hindutva even if they have adopted themselves to Hinduism. Thus, the Muslims and Christians are kept out of this grand design of the race and *rashtra*. Once, this is done, it is easy to mobilize the masses to treat these communities as the enemy Other. On the other hand, there is an attempt to bring through the backdoor, as it were, the Dalits and the tribals to the nation-building exercise. What place and role would be assigned to these subjugated communities is not hidden from anyone who cares to read Indian reality. What is most important is that Savarkar and his followers have managed to utilize this double-edged weapon and have succeeded in pitting the Dalits and the minorities against each other.

At this juncture it is legitimate to raise the question, why do the Dalits allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the dominant castes in general and the fascist forces in particular. One of the most dominant reasons behind this is that the Dalits are economically dependent upon the dominant castes. Economic dependence in turn leads to other forms of dependence and finally ends up in servitude. The iron grip of caste system does not allow the Dalits to have independent minds or to take independent action. Even if some individuals try to develop a sense of independence, they are either ridiculed, stigmatized or kept out of the system. Not only individuals but collective assertion of the Dalits is also denied existence. This is done by the dominant castes by coopting some of the leadership and, thus, assertion and resistance are thwarted once for all.

Writing about the cooptation of the Dalit cultural and political activists and its impact on the Dalit movements in Maharashtra, Gopal Guru is of the opinion that the decline of the cultural movement is contingent upon the overall decline of Dalit political movement in the state. He further states that the decline of the Dalit political movement

as well as the Dalit cultural movement can be accounted by the cooptation of motivated Dalit political and cultural activists by several pacification structures including the state. The net result, according to him, is that it diverted these otherwise true agents of history from transformative politics to the politics of manipulations and creating illusions.[17] It is the projection of illusory liberation which hoodwinks the Dalits and they become the flag bearers and street fighters of the fascist forces. Thus, on the one hand, the fascist forces rope in the support of the Dalits for carrying out its agenda and on the other hand these forces ensure that exclusion and discrimination continues.

A careful examination of how the founders of the Sangh Parivar saw the caste system unravels the real intention of these fascist forces. Speaking on the caste system and the special provisions, Golwalkar writes,

> To our bitter experience, we know how the British used to set up one caste or sect against the other, as for example the 'non-Brahmin' against the 'Brahmin' and play the game of divide and rule, and how our own people, even the so-called leaders, fell a willing prey to it. We should take a lesson from that, and beware of similar designs even now of foreign powers and their agents inside our borders . . . It goes without saying that if anyone is suffering from any disability, social or political, on account of what is called caste, that must be removed completely. Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for Scheduled Castes for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges, on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society.[18]

Golwalkar's argument manages to communicate two messages. On the one hand, by stating that the Sangh Parivar is for the integration of the Dalits into the national mainstream, he wants to project that the Dalits can become part of 'a unified Hindu fold'. Golwalkar does not raise the basic question as to why the Dalits are not integrated because it would expose the unjust Hindu social order. On the other hand, by

taking the name of Dr. Ambedkar he wants to justify the other argument, which was doing the rounds, that the constitutional provision of reservations for the Scheduled Castes should come to an end. It is this ability to use every argument as a double-edged weapon which exhibits the fascist character of the Sangh Parivar.

The Sangh Parivar's game plan to bring the Dalits into the Hindu fold is clearly expressed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's former leader Ashok Singhal, 'For us Hindu means all those religions which have come up from this soil of Hindustan. Dr. Ambedkar upheld the spirit of this country when he stopped the flow of Dalits into foreign religions like Christianity and Islam by propagating the ideals of Buddhism. That way he contributed greatly to the Hindu Dharma. And that is why we consider him one of the pioneers of our ideology and our movement'.[19] By this statement, the VHP leader has achieved more than one goal. He has tried to coopt Ambedkar too into the brahminical fold. This can be called the 'brahminization' process.[20] He has also made it appear that there is no antagonism between Brahminism and Buddhism. And above all he has established this myth that except the Christians and Muslims all the rest belong to the Hindu fold, thus keeping in tact the VHP's constituency.

Another strategy of the Hindutva forces is to strike both spatially and temporally at the root of alternative assertions. Pralay Kanungo in his observant analysis presents the reason why Nagpur became the centre of the RSS. Nagpur had many educational institutions and hence made an impact. Newspapers like *Hitavada* and *Maharashtra* were published from here. One fourth of the educated students in the province were from Nagpur and all of them were Maharashtrian Brahmins. Nagpur was the seat of political power under the Bhonsles and these Brahmins had a dominant position. Their position however began getting challenged by the assertion of the lower castes from the early years of the twentieth century. The All India Depressed Classes Conference at Nagpur on 30-31 May 1920 and Ambedkar's emergence as a militant leader shook the foundation of the structure of Brahmin domination. In this background, Hedgewar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, founded the RSS at Nagpur.[21] Thus it can be argued that cultural nationalism is another name for continuing the culture of dominance.

Going further, it needs to be stated that the Hindutva forces not only upheld the anti-human, exploitative and oppressive caste system

but also engaged in cultural manipulations of the weaker sections. It is expedient at this juncture to present briefly the various game plans employed by the Sangh Parivar to maintain its hold over the Dalits. To cite an example, the RSS has initiated different educational and developmental activities in the slums of Chennai. A youth of Munnusami Nagar of Chennai stated, 'the RSS introduced North Indian ceremonies like Rakshabandan and Ramnavami in our slum to show that we are all Indians; our Ambedkar Night School was renamed into *Hindu Samrajya School*, where classes would begin with the slogan of *"Jaybheem"* and end with abusing the Muslims. They taught us to say that RSS is our mother and the BJP our father. They also claimed that Ambedkar was a RSS activist and distributed key chains bearing the image of Ambedkar.'[22] These activities are undertaken under the scheme of cultural deprivation of the Dalits so that they would be forced to follow the principles and practices propagated by the fascist forces.

There is also an attempt to control the thought pattern by calling for unity and oneness and at other times claiming one's superior status in the caste order. A Dalit youth of Triplicane, another slum in Chennai, asserted that 'Brahminical oppression is pervasive in all fields. They still control the cultural sphere. But above all, to divide the Dalits they have corrupted our leaders. Despite political differences, the Brahmins keep their caste unity in tact. Our Chief Minister takes pride in stating her caste in the Legislative Assembly. It is their unity and pride of belonging to an upper caste which give them the strength to hold on to power and deprive us of our right to organise and assert.'[23] Since, the Dalits are deprived economically, politically, socially and culturally they cannot adequately counter the move of the Hindutva forces. The Dravidian movement that emerged as a very powerful anti-brahminical movement in Tamil Nadu degenerated to be just interested in seizing political power to the detriment of its earlier mission of cultural and social reforms. It thereby enabled Brahminism in the state to re-assert its cultural dominance and created a paradox by catapulting up a Brahmin woman to be its torchbearer to the seat of power.

Christophe Jaffrelot argues that the Hindu nationalists displayed anti-Muslim prejudice, which was nourished by the sentiment of the upper caste superiority. For instance, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Jan Sangh, used revealing arguments while resigning

himself to the Partition of Bengal in 1946, 'If Bengal is converted into Pakistan . . . Bengal Hindus are placed under a permanent tutelage of Muslims. Judging from the manner in which attacks on Hindu religion and society have been made, this means an end of Bengali Hindu culture. In order to placate a set of converts from low caste Hindus to Islam, very ancient Hindu culture will be sacrificed'.[24]

That the fascist forces hate and despise anyone who emerges as leader from the lower castes can be understood from the perception of intellectuals who represent the Hindu fascist ideology. M.V. Kamath in his analysis of the emerging caste relations in India is extremely critical of the politicians from the backward caste and the Dalit communities. According to him, people like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati are making massive efforts to condemn the so-called upper castes as the ones who kept the so-called backward castes suppressed all these centuries. He states that the upper castes are not responsible for oppressing the lower castes; the lower caste leaders are ignorant of history and sociology. Though the lower castes accused the upper castes of oppressing them, the upper castes are ready to help them. He then conjures up a trick of reversing the balance on the lower caste leaders by arguing that by denying the role to upper castes, these leaders are retarding the process of anihilation of caste system. A casteless society can only be established by the exertions of the upper castes and not by the hate mongering of the likes of Kanshi Ram. SCs, OBCs and others need the help of upper castes. Putting the latter down in an act of vengeance will only retard the process to eliminate caste from our society and the country. We need cooperation, not confrontation for India to grow rich once again.'[25]

Against this myth of establishing a casteless society under the benevolence of the Hindu social order, Ambedkar presents the following facts about the degraded and deprived state of the Dalits. In his essay, 'The Indian Ghetto: the Centre of Untouchability', he argues: 'In every village the Touchables have a code which the Untouchables are required to follow. This code lays down the acts of commissions and omissions, which the Touchables treat as offences.

1. The Untouchables must live in separate quarters away from the habitation of the Hindus. It is an offence for

the Untouchables to break or evade the rule of segregation.

2. The quarters of the Untouchables must be located towards the south, since the south is the most inauspicious of the four directions.
3. The Untouchable must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow of pollution as the case may be. It is an offence to break the rule.
4. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to acquire wealth, such as land or cattle.
5. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu.
6. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to ride on a horse or a palanquin through the village.
7. An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as: *(a)* having a contemptible name; *(b)* not wearing clean clothes; *(c)* not having tiled roofs; *(d)* not wearing silver and gold ornaments.[26]

Even a reformist movement like the Arya Samaj could not totally break away from the sway of the caste system, from the Hindu social order, and ultimately from brahminical hegemony. J. L. Brockington argues,

> Although the Arya Samaj was hesitant in advocating reform of the caste system, being anxious to remain within the mainstream of Hinduism, it was on this issue that its characteristic development hinged. For another of Dayananda's prime concerns was to counter what he saw as a menacing stream of conversions to Islam and Christianity, especially among low caste Hindus. The rite of purification for the readmission of such converts to Hinduism was a major weapon in this field, an inno-

> vation to placate orthodox opinion . . . Nevertheless, the success enjoyed by this new campaign gradually involved the Arya Samaj more and more in communal agitation and into alliance with the Hindu Mahasabha, an ultra-orthodox political group, despite the Arya Samaj claims that it did not take part in politics.[27]

In the ultimate analysis even these reformist trends contributed to the maintenance of the Dalits at the lowest place in the social order. Mark Juergensmeyer in his analysis of interaction between the Dalits of Punjab and the Arya Samaj highlights the fact that the Dalit leaders saw in the latter's spread among the Dalits another attempt to keep them outside the system. He stated that the Arya Samaj was a reform movement dedicated to returning Hinduism to a purer form in which the more unpleasant features of caste prejudice would be alleviated. The author goes on to point out that the *Samaj in a gesture of benevolence* (emphasis mine) to the lower castes started organizations for them and also allowed them to participate in *shuddhi* so that they could be admitted into Hindu fold. But to the leaders of the Dalits this generosity seemed to be deviousness of the worst sort, seducing the untouchables into accepting a religious tradition that would always, whatever the guise, relegate them to a lower status.[28] Thus, even in the religious reform movements the attitude and behaviour of the dominant castes to subjugate the Dalits continues to operate.

Lakshmi Narasu in his analysis of the Indian caste system presents the centrality of brahminical hegemony and its debilitating effect.

> The caste system is essentially brahminical and it has spread with . . . brahminism. Where the Brahmin is, there is inevitably the system of castes and the pariah. With a view to keep the lower castes in perpetual childhood and slavish mentality, brahminism checks the development of intellect and encourages all appetite for the monstrous and the absurd. If caste, untouchability, social barriers, pollutions, idolatry, distinguishing myths were removed, would there be any Hinduism left? The so-called educated Hindus are slaves to the unreason of their benighted ancestors. Over a great mass of irrational predisposition there is only a veneer of culture which

sways influence in the hour of fear and excitement.[29]

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Hindu fascist forces is the predominance of the brahminical elements in the Sangh Parivar. According to J. A. Curran, 'Many persons who were acquainted with the RSS in its first years have suggested another motive for the decision behind its founding, namely, a desire, common to many Brahmins of the Maharashtrian region inspired by the Shivaji tradition, to restore Maratha Brahmin eminence. It is true that Hedgewar and those around him were affected by the martial traditions of Maharashtra and influenced by the Shivaji cult, but the evidence seems to indicate that their Maharashtrian loyalties were subordinate to their national loyalties. The Hindu "Nation" as a whole was their concern.'[30]

Curran goes on to argue that the reason that all of the chief leaders of the RSS have been Maharashtrian Brahmins is that in the first years of the Sangh, Hedgewar restricted its activities to Nagpur and the immediate vicinity. The membership was kept small. In those circumstances it was natural for most of the recruits of this period to be of the same caste as Hedgewar and his co-founders—Maharashtrian Brahmins. Hedgewar trained those first volunteers to be his chief assistants, and this explains the predominance of Maharashtrian Brahmin leadership throughout the history of the RSS. With the commencement of recruitment operations on a large-scale, membership was drawn from all social groups among the Hindu community. There are still many Maharashtrian Brahmins in the organization, but they are a definite minority. All castes and some outcastes are beginning to have representatives in the higher echelons of the hierarchy; in time the composition of the high command will be affected by this process.[31] But Curran's forecast has been proved wrong.

It is of seminal significance to note that Curran's later writings contradict his own argument. 'In all probability the imprisonment of approximately 1,700 of the most important RSS members until August 1948 saved their lives. Many members and sympathizers of the RSS, as well as those of the Hindu Mahasabha who were not in custody, were given rough treatment by the infuriated mobs, in the Maharashtrian area. These anti-RSS and anti-Mahasabha mob actions had an additional anti-Brahmin tinge. Many Brahmins unconnected

with the Sangh or the Mahasabha were attacked and severely beaten.'[32] This goes to reiterate the historical fact that the RSS's total force at the higher echelon comes from the Brahmins. The appointment of Mr. Bangaru Laxman, a Dalit, as the President of the BJP, is an indication that the Hindutva forces are willing to 'share power' in their front organizations. This strategy helps them in two ways: *(i)* They can project this myth that they are not averse to have even a Dalit or a tribal at the helm of affairs; *(ii)* but the Sangh continues to remain the bastion of the Brahmins.

The most intriguing point of the matter is that not only RSS but the BJP also suffers from this image of being a Brahmin outfit. Arvind Lele, the former MLA from Pune and treasurer of the BJP in Maharashtra explained, 'Congress had the power, strong economic networks, muscle power, caste appeal with the Maratha-Kunbi and bahujan samaj. It was a major factor that we were branded as a Brahmin party, though Uttamrao Patil, a Maratha, and so many bahujan samaj people were with us. Uttamrao Patil was our president for so many years. Motiramji Lahane was our president. All our presidents were from the bahujan samaj. But the bahujan samaj image is more for Congress and not for us. Because a certain tradition in the state right from Satyasodhak Samaj and Mahatma Phule is with Congress and against us. Therefore we are branded as a Brahmin party, as a "new avatar of Hindu Mahasabha". In Maharashtra this non-Brahmin feeling was always a major obstacle. It is still so even now.'[33] Maharashtra Hindutva could be called the Brahmin cocoon Hindutva.

Though the Sangh Parivar is the creation of Brahmins, it has the ability to adapt itself in different circumstances. Rob Jenkins labels the Hindutva in Rajasthan as Rajput Hindutva or martial Hindutva. According to him , Rajasthan plays an important role in the revival of Hinduism and, in extension, of Hindutva forces. This was so since Rajasthan always represented an assertive, self-confident and martial tradition of Hinduism. There is also a reading of history which considers that in other parts of India, the martial traditions of Hinduism was lost to Muslim and Western influence while Rajasthan kept up the tradition. Rob Jenkins is of the view that the Hindutva forces saw in Rajasthan the sacrificial fire which protects Hindu interest which can also reinvigorate other regions into this flame.

In other regions the martial tradition of Hinduism has been lost under the influence of Muslim and Western rule but in Rajasthan 'the flame of honour has not yet been snuffed out. It is the "sacred fire" from which the rest of India can reignite its sense of lost strength and vitality.'[34] It is in this region of martial Hindutva that the Dalits are subjected to the most cruel forms of oppression and discrimination. There are over 17.29 percent of Dalits in Rajasthan. Out of this only 25 percent of them are literate. The deplorable fact is that even an educated Dalit who is employed as teacher in a government school cannot drink water from the same pot from which the dominant caste children drink.

At regular intervals there have been attempts to rope in Sikhism into the brahminical fold. Gurharpal Singh is of the view that for the BJP and its sister organizations, Sikhism is essentially a militant Hindu sect, a 'martial face' of Hinduism. At the height of the troubles in 1984, a BJP resolution declared: 'The Sikh Panth was born to protect Hinduism and the venerable Gurus sacrificed themselves and their dear children to protect Hindu honour. The Sikh contribution to the strength and prosperity of India is magnificent, and the nation is truly grateful.'[35] This not withstanding, the RSS founded the Rashtriya Sikh Sanghat, that is, National Sikh Front, in the same year to attract the Sikh community who were wounded by the Operation Blue Star.

These attempts and propaganda have been countered by some of the Sikhs and Sikh organizations, who repeatedly asserted that they are not part of the Hindu fold. But a political party like the Akali Dal has an electoral alliance with the BJP which is contradictory to the principles of Sikhism. Hence, in the 2002 Assembly Elections this alliance was defeated and Congress came back to power. Further, the refusal of the Jat Sikhs to allow representation of the Ad-dharm Sikhs in the Baba Nihal Singh Smadh-Gurdwara in Talhan, Punjab (see Essay 11) is another instance of this historical denial of equality and rights to the Dalits. Though Sikhism is based on the principles of *sangat* (community) and *langar* (common kitchen) and Sikhism posed one of the serious critiques to Brahminism in Punjab, in reality Sikhism also practices Untouchability when it comes to the Dalits.[36] It is this contradiction Sikhism will have to face squarely if it has to pose a challenge to Brahminism which is threatening to assimilate them.

Taken together, the social seclusion that the Dalits were subjected to by the brahminical forces was not limited to the denial of the right to interact with the dominant castes, inter-dining, inter-marriage, entry into temples, be represented in socio-religious organizations as some social scientists would argue, but it also resulted in the denial of the right to own and operate resources. Further, this oppressive social process deprived them of the right to appropriate the fruits of their labour. Thus, the Dalits were reduced to being just a producing class for the betterment, enjoyment, and development of the non-producing dominant castes.[37] It is this deprivation, which ultimately leads to cultural deprivation and thus sealed their fate as the most discriminated beings on this earth.

Even as early as in the 1881 Census enumeration, a bias against the lower castes was recorded. The Census enumerators could not situate the low castes and the tribals in relation to religion. It is reported, 'Many of the more bigoted high caste Hindoos employed as census enumerators or supervisors objected to record such low persons as of the Hindoo religion. This was illustrated by numerous instances brought to my notice of such persons having been recorded as of the Dher, Mang or Chandal religion by mere repetition of their caste in the column for religion. Possibly some in their humility and ignorance may not even have claimed to be of the Hindoo religion. More probably they were not even asked.'[38] This goes to establish the fact that for the so-called dominant caste Hindus, the lower castes did not matter except as labouring and service providing organisms. The antagonism expressed towards the Dalits by the right wing Hindu forces today finds an echo in the past principles and practices.

Alternative Dalit Ideology

Having examined the historical discontinuities that exist between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces, it is essential to explore some of the salient features of alternative Dalit ideology which would provide pointers for Dalit liberation and emancipation.

The most important fact that has emerged among the Dalits for their liberation from the onslaught of the fascist forces is to understand the game plan of these forces. One of the often repeated game plans of the dominant castes is in the name of protecting the common interest

or greater good of the country, the Dalits have been enlisted to sacrifice their specific interests and rights. This is clearly expressed in the final settlement of the Poona Pact, which was the result of an adamant stance taken by Gandhi to block the demand of Dr. Ambedkar for separate electorates to promote the legitimate political participation of the Dalits. In this regard Ambedkar wrote,

> This fast unto death was a great gamble on the part of Mr. Gandhi. He perhaps felt that the mere threat to fast unto death would make me and other Depressed Classes who were with me just shiver and yield. But he soon found that he was mistaken and that the Untouchables were equally determined to fight to the last for their rights. No one except his own followers was convinced that Mr. Gandhi's fast had any moral basis and if Gandhi got a second lease of life, he owes it entirely to the generosity and goodwill shown towards him by the Untouchables.[39]

Understanding this game plan of the right wing Hindutva forces would enable the Dalits to be cautious not to be hoodwinked by them any more.

There is an emerging awareness that the Dalits have to chalk out a liberation path of their own.

> The Dalits have never been charmed by the Sangh Parivar. They have too often and too regularly been victims of the forces of aggressive Hindutva and Brahmanism to harbour any illusions about these forces. The attitude of the Hindutva forces towards the Dalits is almost a replica of their attitude towards the minorities: the Muslims and the Christians. Stay in the country in peace and security at our pleasure and sufferance is the 'promise' to these sections. We may grant you some concessions and rights but do not dare to agitate for them, and above all do not ever hurt the sentiments of the majority by even mentioning caste, caste oppression, untouchablity, and caste atrocities. In every instance of atrocity against the Dalits the Hindutva forces in one way or the other have blamed the Dalits them-

> selves. This is the same attitude that says, 'The Muslims in Gujarat got the treatment they deserved'. The Dalits nevertheless have to be won over, first as voters and then as street fighters in implementing the Hindu Rashtra agenda.[40]

It is this awareness that the Dalits have been and are used as a vote bank and street fighters for the well being and progress of the Hindutva forces which has generated power to oppose this sinister plan. Ambedkar's embracing Buddhism led to a mass movement, both spatially and temporally:

> Even the poorest, came clad in the spotless white shirts and saris that had been prescribed for the occasion by their beloved leader. Some families had had to sell trinkets in order to buy their new clothes and meet the expense of the journey, but they had made the sacrifice gladly and set out for Nagpur with songs on their lips and the hope of a new life in their heart . . . Some stayed with the relations in Mahar ghettoes. Many simply camped on any patch of waste ground they could find . . . By the end of the week 400,000 men, women and children had poured into Nagpur, with the result that the population had nearly doubled and the white clad Untouchables had virtually taken over the city. The Caste Hindus . . . gazed with astonishment at the spectacle of tens of thousands of clean, decently dressed, well behaved and well-organised people in whom they had difficulty in recognizing their former slaves and serfs.[41]

These acts of defiance and assertion need to be carried out at all levels possible. Dalit masses should continuously monitor the coopting and discarding strategies of the brahminical forces. In this regard Anand Teltumbde presents a historical caution. 'Initially, the Hindutva forces grudged Ambedkar's virulent criticism of everything Hindu and sulked over his forsaking Hindu religion and embracing Buddhism. But when they realized that Ambedkar represented the aspirations of the vast majority of Dalits in the country, who constituted at least 16 percent of the total population and hence any criticism of Ambedkar would mean

alienation of the entire Dalit-mass from the Sangh Parivar, they adapted a strategy of coopting Ambedkar (see also Essays 2 and 4).[42]

Kancha Ilaiah is of the view that Dalitization of civil society, state and administration apparatus is not going to be an easy task.

> The Dalitbahujans want that it should be achieved as peacefully as possible; they have never been lovers of violence. But the enemy forces have survived only through violence . . . the Dalitbahujan movements, should be aware of the hurdles and complications that modern brahminical intellectuals are going to create . . . the only way to historicize the past and safeguard the future is to create an army of organic intellectuals—men and women—from Dalitbahujan forces. Dalitbahujan organic intellectuals must work out a long-term strategy, both political and economic to restructure social relations in a massive way. If the Brahmins shout from their rooftops 'Hinduize India', we must shout from our toddy palms, from the fields, from treetops 'Dalitize India'. We must shout, 'We hate Hinduism, we hate Brahminism, we love our culture and more than anything, we love ourselves.'[43]

Finally, Ambedkar's prophetic words provide pointers for a long drawnout struggle.

> How to bring about the reform of the Hindu social order? How to abolish caste? Inter-dining and intermarriage seems to be a solution. Yet to agitate for and to organize inter-caste marriage is like forced feeding brought about by artificial means. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so . . . You must take the stand that Buddha and Nanak took. You must not only discard the Shastras, you must deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak. You must have courage to tell the Hindus, that what is wrong with them is their religion: the religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of caste.[44]

> The movement of the untouchables against the injustice of the Hindu social order has a long history behind it, especially in Maharashtra. This history falls into two stages. The first stage was marked by petitions and protests. The second stage is marked by open revolt in the form of direct action against the Hindu established order. This change of attitude was due to two circumstances. In the first place it was due to the realization that the petitions and protests had failed to move the Hindus. In the second place the government had declared that all public utilities and public institutions are open to all citizens including the Untouchables. The right to wear any kind of clothes or ornaments are some of the rights which British Indian Law gives to the Untouchables along with the rest. To these were added the rights to the use of public utilities and institutions, such as wells, schools, buses, trams, railways, public offices, etc., were now put beyond the pale of doubt. But owing to the opposition of the Hindus the Untouchables cannot make any use of them. It is to meet the situation, the Untouchables decided to change the methods and to direct action to redress their wrongs. This change took place about 1920.[45]

Since the ramifications of the Hindutva forces are unfolding slowly it is difficult to define them. But some of the consequences, especially from the perspective of the Dalits, provide scope for understanding. The emergence of the Hindutva forces is a means to perpetuate the institutionalization of exclusion. Dalit-tribal assertion and people's movement sounded a warning to the brahminical forces. Hence to continue their hegemony they have come up with new slogan 'Hindu Nationalism'. Continued deprivation of the Dalits once again reinforces their dependence on the dominant castes. It is this reality which reduces the Dalits to do 'begari', become a vote bank and now street fighters for the aggrandizement of the brahminical forces. The ability of the Hindutva forces to propose alternative ideologies, agendas and slogans also has a role in the subjugation of the Dalits. It is at this juncture the Dalit activists, intellectuals, politicians are called upon to build parallel institutions, alliances, and so on, for the liberation and emancipation of the Dalits from the clutches of the Hindutva forces.

Notes

1. Many terms are used to refer to right wing Hindu communalism. They are 'Hindutva forces', 'Hindu Fascism', 'majority communalism', and so on. The men who propagate the right wing Hindutva ideology operate under various fora and organizations like the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, BJP, ABVP. These organizations are clubbed under the generic term 'Sangh Parivar'. The term 'Sangh' refers to the RSS. Since the RSS gave rise to many of these frontal organizations and continues to operate as the central, coordinating agency, these frontal organizations are placed within the Sangh Parivar.
2. Gail Omvedt, 'Dalits and the Democratic Revolution'. In *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Delhi: Sage, 1994); and Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991).
3. Ghanshyam Shah, 'Caste, Hindutva and Hideousness.' In *Fascism in India: Faces, Fangs and Facts*, edited by Krishna Chaitanya (Delhi: Manak Publications, 2003): 304-312.
4. Prakash Louis, *'Dalit Utpeedan: Chakwara se Jhajjar tak'. Hindustan*, 29 Oct 2002.
5. This alliance was a short-time honeymoon between diametrically opposed political parties. Whatever has been the consequence of this short-lived alliance only history will bear witness. But the way in which Mayawati, the leader of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, has been subjected to witch hunting by the former alliance partner BJP and Samajwadi Party goes to bear the fact that power or no power, the dominant castes never lose control over the situation. It appeared that Mayawati would wring some benefits for the Dalits of Uttar Pradesh this time but the powerful dominant castes in alliance with the upper backward castes brought down the government even before any programmes could be undertaken.
6. Louis, *Dalit Utpeedan*.
7. Prakash Louis, and R. Vashum, eds., *Extraordinary Laws in India: A Reader for Understanding Legislations Endangering Civil Liberties* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2002); Prakash Louis compiled *Policy Documents of the Government of India: A Reader for Understanding Policies that Determine the Lives of Millions of Citizens* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2003). A careful reading of these policies unravels this fact that the well being and rights of the citizens of this country are relegated to the background. In the name of growth, development, national unity draconian

laws are being enacted at regular intervals.

8. T. B. Hansen, and C. Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
9. Interestingly, whenever former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi felt that her 'authority' was threatened, she engaged in this type of sloganeering. Whether it was to accuse her political opponents or to justify the imposition of the Emergency, she often took recourse to projecting an 'external hand' in disturbing the stability of the country. For more on this refer to Ram Avatar Sharma, *Indira Gandhi's Leadership* (Delhi: Raja Prakashan, 1986).
10. Prakash Louis, The *Emerging Hindutva Force: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000).
11. 'RSS: How It Functions?' All India Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, Delhi (nd): 8. While the political face of the Sangh Parivar came to the political arena in a potent manner only from the late 1980s, its various branches were operative over seven decades or more. In the same manner, opposition to the sinister plans of the fascist forces has also been erupting at regular intervals. Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan is one such attempt.
12. Sumit Sarkar. The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar. *EPW* 28, 5 (30 January 1993): 163.
13. Jayant Lele, *Hindustan: The Emergence of the Right* (Chennai: Earth worm Books, 1995): xvii.
14. Ibid,: xviii-xix.
15. V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Mumbai: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1989): 27.
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Gopal Guru, *Dalit Cultural Movement and Dialectics of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1997): i.
18. M. S. Golwalkar, A *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Jagaran Prakashan, 1980): 465-466.
19. Ashok Singhal. Interview in *Frontline,* 31 December 1993. This type of shifting one's discourse from being a staunch critic of a person, ideology, value or issue to engulfing these and drawing marrow for one's argument is one of the game plans of the fascist forces. Singhal and supporters who prefer cattle to a Dalit have become adept at turning even the most contradictory features to their advantage.
20. By brahminization what is indicated is the attempt of the brahminical forces to coopt any one leader who is at the other end of the spectrum and posed challenge to the very hierarchical brahminical order. When the person is alive or dead the brahminical forces coopt him so as to

attract those who followed him. This was done with Ravidas and now is being done with Dr. Ambedkar.

21. Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002):39-40.
22. S. Anandhi, *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Modern Slums* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1995): 37.
23. Anandhi, *Contending Identities:* 47.
24. Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics:* 24.
25. Ibid: 26.
26. Dr. B. R. Ambdekar, *Writings and Speeches,* edited by Vasant Moon, vol. 20 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, 1990): 21-22. This collection of Dr. Ambedkar's Speeches and Writings have become one of the powerful source material for Dalit awareness, mobilization and struggles.
27. J. L. Brockington, *The Sacred Thread* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 179-180.
28. Mark Juergensmeyer. *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchables in Twentieth-Century Punjab.* Berkeley: University of California Press: 1982): 64.
29. Lakshmi Narasu, *Religion of the Modern Buddhist* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002): 38.
30. J. C. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS* (Delhi: All India Quami Ekta Sammelan, 1979): 15.
31. Ibid: 16.
32. Ibid: 27.
33. Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics:* 126.
34. Ibid: 105.
35. Ibid: 230.
36. Prakash Louis, *Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion* (Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2003): 335-359.
37. Ibid.
38. Report on the Census of British India taken on 17 February 1881, vol.1 (HMSO, London 1883) as quoted in John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000): 14. Whether it is the census enumeration or school enrolment, the Dalits go through the stigma of being untouchables. Even if one overcomes this hurdle, they are ridiculed in their work place. The terms of address like '*sarkari mehman*' or similar terms go to express the deep-seated hatred and antagonism that exists in the minds of the dominant castes. The Hindutva forces have further provided sustenance to this practice by opposing reservation, arguing that this divides Hindu society.

39. Dr. B. R. Ambdekar, *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 5 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, 1990): 39-40.
40. Anand Teltumbde, *Ambedkar on Muslims*: *Myths and Facts* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2003): 15.
41. Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahminism and Caste* (Delhi: Sage, 2003): 261.
42. Teltumbde, *Ambedkar on Muslims*: 19.
43. Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996).
44. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* edited by Vasant Moon, vol. 1 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, 1979): 67-69.
45. Ibid: vol 5: 245.

7

Dalits Face a Culture Threat Both from Within and Without

Gopal Guru

The apparent involvement of the Dalits in some of the devastating communal riots in the country has been a common concern expressed by the secular forces in India. This moral indictment and sometime anger against Dalits was much more pronounced after the Gujarat genocide of innocent Muslims. Of course, there are other minorities, for example, Christians, who have also been recipients of violence as perpetrated by the Hindutva forces. These concerned secularists and citizens included everyone right from the socialists to communists. How does one understand this reaction to this alleged involvement of Dalits? One could refute this understanding on the polemical ground and say why only Dalits? Does not blaming only Dalits assumes that the secular commitment of others is given and hence beyond any doubt? Since the answer cannot be given in the affirmative one has to raise the second question. The Dalits should answer this question on rather moral grounds. If they want to take a moral lead in the fight against the majority communalism, then they must answer this question. I would like to argue that Dalits should take a moral lead on this question and answer it without being answerable to anyone.

While it may be true that there could be Dalit involvement in such riots, however, the question that needs an answer is why this involvement? This question has to be answered in terms of different but interrelated factors. One of the important factors that can explain this involvement is the force of globalization, and the second factor is related to the lack of capital to create the condition for secularism. The history of the organized Dalit movement shows that the Hindutva

forces found it quite difficult to make any inroads in the Dalit constituencies because radical and secular ideology had a complete grip over the intellectual imagination of the Dalit masses in most parts of the country. The Dalits, it is true in most parts of the country, have a history of struggle against the caste-forces that characterizes either the Brahmins or the non-Brahmins. I am using 'non-Brahmin' in the contemporary sense. This usage is entirely different from the sense that was in vogue during the 1920s. During the freedom struggle the non-Brahmin was not positively hostile to Dalits in Maharashtra, Mysore and the Madras regions. It was because of two factors: firstly, the Dalits' political assertion was directed much against the brahminical social domination, of which the non-Brahmins were also the victims; secondly, the non-Brahmins were too feeble economically to provide a counterpoint for the Dalit subversive consciousness. They offered a counter point only after they assumed dominant power after independence. One can see the major clashes between the dominant and entrenched castes, as Beteille [1] and Srinivas would define them. [2] Sharad Patil, a creative Marxist from Maharashtra, uses *a-brahminy* as the opposite of brahminical. He argues in his entire writings a-brahminy is not the derivative of Brahmin and has its own independent conceptual trajectory.[3] Similarly Jotirao Phule is very careful in subsuming Dalits under non-Brahmin. In fact, he does not use 'non-Brahmin'; instead he uses Shudra and ati- Shudra as the politically relevant category against Brahminism.[4] Today's non-Brahmins are not just the sociological reality that is primarily defined in terms of the ideology of purity-pollution, but they are defined much more in terms of their repressive patriarchical state and cultural power that they use against Dalits all over the country. The Hindutva forces galvanized these middle level but politically powerful castes against Dalits, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra and Gujarat. My own study of the Bombay communal riots of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveals that Dalits have shown that they were not available for communal propaganda.[5] Even during the recent genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, one could see Dalits taking a firm stand in favour of Muslims. Even during the Hindutva mobilization before independence Dalits have shown remarkable restraint despite the fact that there were repeated attempts by the Hindutva forces to provoke and project them against the minority. For example, some of the leading Hindu

Mahasabha leaders did try to project Dalits as anti-Muslims.[6] However it is quite true that Dalits were positioned against Muslims more as oppressors from the exploitative class than as persons from a particular religion. Obviously, the Dalits could not be mobilized against the Christians because of the philanthropic association with the latter. However, Dalits were sceptical about the Christian missionary patronage. Even those Dalits who were not well disposed toward the minorities showed their scepticism in this regard. The Dalits, particularly from Maharashtra, could not be mobilized against the minorities because of *(a)* the ideological influence of Ambedkar in the initial years; *(b)* the similarity of culture (beef eating) among the minorities and Dalits which did not let Dalits to attack the minorities; *(c)* the primacy of the 'social'. The Dalit struggle both during the freedom movement and after continues to pitch itself against the Hindutva forces that continue to produce and reproduce structures of indignities and humiliation. Dalits seem to be engaged against the socially oppressive dominant caste forces in the country. In other words, for Dalits, the struggle for dignity is the struggle for equal social standing. It is this primacy of the social that seem to be governing conflicting relationships in society. It is also necessary to note that the dignity struggle is also creeping into the Muslim and Christian establishments as well. For example, the Muslim Pasmanda Samaj based at Patna and the Dalit Christian liberation movement started by Rev. Arvind Nirmal are two major examples that can explain the dignity movement within the two religions. However, the basic site for dignity struggle has been and is Hindutva.

The Hindutva forces are painfully aware about these castes, that is, the Dalits, as political compulsion. The caste issues thus put the Hindutva forces on the defensive and one could find them trying to be nice to the Dalits so that the Dalits would not rub the former on the wrong side. One could see the supporters of the Hindutva worldview favouring Dalit officers as against the OBCs or middle caste officers. One could see a brahmin officer favouring a Dalit against the Maratha officer in the bank or the LIC offices. This sense of patronage was evident among the upper caste officers in the early years of the public sector in Maharashtra. The RSS saw a formidable oppostitonal power in Dalits which could be used against the OBCs and middle castes. Under the Congress hegemony, the anger of the Hindutva forces against

the non-Brahmins was very deep and dangerous. These forces wanted to consolidate their criticism of the new structures of power that were responsible for the displacement of the Brahmins from the site of power. It is due to these strategic reasons that the Hindutva forces found it difficult to mobilize the Dalits against the Muslims. As mentioned earlier, there were isolated incidents of the Muslim landlords exploiting Dalits and the Dalits revolting both against the Hindu and Muslim landlords.

Recently some incidents have taken place where the Dalits appear moving towards Hindutva. The question is why? There could be three basic reasons. The public sector that absorbed the Dalits in the opportunity structures has lost the capacity to accommodate them. It can no longer accommodate the Dalits as there has been no recruitment in these sectors. The public sector had created confidence among the Dalits to stand against any kind of upper caste domination. Kanshi Ram's movement could be possible only because of the domination of upper castes in the public sector. Now the public sector is no longer the site of caste domination because, firstly, the upper caste people have moved out from the public sector to the private sector and, secondly, the public sector itself is facing serious threat of liquidation; and hence there is no chance for high profile caste discrimination. It is due to this dismantling of the public sector that the organized Dalit response is on decline.

One of the other reasons that can explain this relative silence of Dalit politics against caste discrimination is the growing depletion of reservation that prompted the non-Dalits to size up the Dalits on a caste basis. Some years ago, as the media reported, the World Bank had suggested that appointments in the public sector need to be made based on merit alone. Since reservation provided sufficient condition for caste conflict and since it is fast disappearing from the public sectors as opportunity, there is less chance of caste conflict with the non-Dalits.

Now the locus of caste conflict has shifted to the real political arena where the Dalits are now knocking at the door of the capitalists and asking the latter to open up job reservations in the private sector. Of course the demand is still tilting towards social engineering. By definition, this political challenge to the capitalist has inherent limitation inasmuch as it has middle class aspiration as its motivational basis. As of today, the private sector is closed to Dalits. It is this

frustration that leads most of the educated unemployed and urban Dalits to walk over to the Hindutva bandwagon. The case of Siddarth Tarun Mandal in Pune as studied by Dinesh Thite in his doctoral thesis sufficiently explains this shift.[7] I am also informed about the similar references from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It is in this sense where the public sectors do not offer any opportunity and the capitalists close the doors on the face of Dalits, then the most easy way to stay relevant in the eyes of the family members is to associate with Hindutva, participate in cultural progarmmes not so much for spiritual satisfaction but more for material gains. It is these educated unemployed Dalits who are impelled to support the Hindutva agenda. They, however, do not have a serious stake in the Hindutva cause. Their interest in such a thing is limited only to the cultural life like Ganapati and Durga Pujas. These are useful cultural/religious festivals for the Dalits for two reasons; it offers two kinds of promises to Dalits. Firstly, it gives them some petty material benefits like a little pocket money, a little glamour and visibility in the public life. Secondly, it also offers them some kind of space for cultural satisfaction. These are the Dalits who were terribly attracted towards Buddhism. However, Buddhism as offered by Ambedkar is much more philosophical and a moral alternative than the cultural industry that Hindutva offers. Since culture is a need that has to be satisfied on an everyday basis, Buddhism based on rationalism cannot fulfil this need Ultimately, Dalits are pushed towards the Hindutva forces. This kind of cultural vacuum then makes it possible for the Hindutva forces to impose their cultural choices on the Dalit masses through the electronic media. One would not be surprised to see that Dalits women instead of going for *Buddha vandana* prefer to watch the 'sas-bahu' family soaps on TV. The other western channels are no alternatives to Dalits because these channels do not offer any promise to keep the communitarian bonds intact within the Dalit community. Obviously, the western channel promotes disembodied individualism/consumerism and the glamour that does not resonate with the common Dalit life.

Even the cultural alternative that is being offered under the package of globalization does not provide powerful alternatives to Dalits. For the enjoyment of global culture you are required to possess money, which Dalits lack. For example, if they want to enjoy a pizza they must have at least Rs. 50, if not more. Similarly, if they want to adopt a

global dress code or consumption style, they have to have buying capacity. Unlike youth from the non-Dalit middle classes, the Dalit youth either goes for subsidized satisfaction of becoming the local Michael Jackson or eating locally made pizzas or having some kind of colored liquid as a substitute for branded soft drink. Those who cannot even afford to have the moral capacity to militate against all these attractions go for window-shopping or succumb to the promising cultural festivals run by the Hindutva forces. Thus, it is the real and not the illusory that forces Dalits to make a shift towards the Hindutva forces. It is really a very pragmatic choice and not the substantive one. In this regard it is necessary to keep in mind that the occupation of global culture in terms of a distinctive consumerist life style, ideas, modes of behaviour, dress, fashion or becoming a member of the world community remains only a theoretical possibility.

Even if this becomes an actuality, should they become bourgeois even in limited cultural terms if not in a substantive sense of it? These educated but unemployed Dalits cannot have the choice to become a bourgeois even at the symbolic level because the frustration backed by the total lack of opportunity structures is so profound that they can only imagine becoming bourgeois. Secondly, becoming bourgeois even in the substantive sense would not be morally available to Dalits as it is fundamentally based on the logic of exploitation as it stands clearly on the exploitation of somebody—most probably Dalits themselves. Should, therefore, the Dalits become bourgeoisie and exploit Dalits? The answer cannot be given in the affirmative.

The other structural reasons that can explain this little shift of Dalits towards the Hindutva forces is the depletion and destruction of the structures that harboured caste conflict in order to obliterate their class content. These vibrant structures did not require the transmutation of caste into any other regressive category. Industrial capital needed caste to dilute the class content. Thus the Indian bourgeoisie never required communalism of any kind to divide the working classes. They followed a parochial recruitment policy for the workers and also arranged the social morphology in such a way that the workers would remain perpetually divided on caste lines. For example, the Bombay industrialists together with the British imperialists took initiatives in building the caste based tenements named as BDD chawls in the vicinity of textile mills. This was done with the intention of achieving caste-

fragmentation among the working classes. However, they could not achieve the desired level of success. Whatever success, they could achieve in terms of fanning hostilities, the gains were quite marginal. Nevertheless, the ruling classes never required communalism as the dividing force. Communalism moreover would have possibly proved costlier than the existing caste divide for industrial capital.

In the age of globalization, the capitalist investment in Bombay being in the non-industrial areas like financial—banking as well as speculative sectors—it does not require caste contradiction. This has happened because the textile mills are nearly liquidated because of the force of global and commercial capital. The workers are forced to vacate these BDD chawals. Commercial capital, both national as well as international, and also the local one require these chawls for lucrative property development. The workers are selling these little chawls and moving out to the periphery of Mumbai. These workers are selling their little rooms from the chawls because they have nothing to fall back on. Since their source of livelihood (textile mill) has disappeared; most of them have either gone back to their villages in Maharashtra or have moved into the filth of the city slums.

In slums, castes survive but as the social reality and not as a political necessity. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that caste has been pushed into a residual category and not as a politically volatile one. People require caste only as the mundane reality. It has made the task of the Hindutva forces quite easy. Now they can transmute the caste people into the communal category where they become Hindus, forgetting their caste antagonism and adversarial identities. It is in the slums of Mumbai or some other places where the Hindutva forces have achieved some success. Even in Ahmedabad one could find the same logic that can explain the Dalits shift towards Hindutva forces. In addition, there was no political will to support anti-communal measures. The forces of capital now do not fear a communal holocaust as their investment is in speculative capital, which is outside the reach of communal fire. Hence, one would not expect them to control the communal forces.

What lesson should the Dalits draw from this? They should go back to the caste question, as it still is the major problem in the country. They need to interrogate the Hindutuva forces on this count. Should they do it through mainstream Dalits politics? Perhaps not; because

the pragmatist politics does not maintain its moral stamina! Thus one will have to think about revolutionary politics to confront both the forces that are communalizing the Dalits and globalization that is forcing the Dalits to walk into the trap of the former.

Notes

1. Andre Beteille, *Castes: Old and New: Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratufication* (London: Asia Publishing, 1969).
2. M. N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3. Sharad Patil, *Marxvaad Phule Ambedkarvaad* (Pune: Sugawa, 1994).
4. Y. D. Phadke ed., *Mahatma Phule: Samagra Wangamaya* (Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal, 1991).
5. Gopal Guru. Understanding Communal Riots in Maharashtra. *EPW* (8 May 1993); 903.
6. V. D. Savarkar, 'Sangeet Ushrup'. (written in 1927) In *Swantryaveer Savarkar Rashtriya Smarak, Savarkar Samagar,* vol. 4 (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2000).
7. Dinesh Thite, 'Culture, Mobilization and Politics in an Urban Setting', Ph.D. diss., Dept. of Politics and Public Administration, University of Pune, 2002.

8

Dalit-Hindutva Alliance and the Dynamics of Dalit Politics

Ramesh Kamble

Since the 1980s and the 1990s, the rise of the Hindutva movement set in motion by the brahminic Hindu rightist outfit, the RSS, has led to the unleashing of forces that have tried to present a monolithic notion of culture, history, society and identity in India. The notion of Hindutva including the project of a brahminic Hindu Rashtra has existed for some decades. It occupied the fringe of right wing and reactionary ideology. It became a potent social and political force only in the past two decades or so, thanks mainly to the systematic, planned, and persistent work of the RSS. The hegemony of monolithic brahminical perspective on India's culture, history and society, realized by harbouring fanatic religiosity, has led to attempts at 'rewriting' of history and production of a particular kind of knowledge on the one hand, and the most violent and ghastly events in recent social history on the other. Moreover, making the monolithic brahminic view of culture and history the essential components of nationalism has further led to privileging unconditional loyalty to the brahminic notion of nation and condemnation of the Other who does not abide by this view. Thus with the tool of Hindutva, Brahminism has assumed the power to 'discipline and punish' the Other who asserts the different—multi-cultural and non-brahminic—view of India's culture, history and society.

Hindutva's relationship with the Other is characterized by three, not necessarily mutually exclusive, approaches: constituting and containing the Other; its marginalization; and finally, its elimination. This has happened in three ways: The first is the accommodation, re-interpretation, and then appropriation of religiosity and traditions of

non-brahminic groups within the 'mainstream' Hindu fold—of course, in a subsidiary manner—to enlist their support for the brahminic Hindutva project. The second is the 'advice' to non-Hindu communities that assert their difference: accept the brahminic notion of nationalism or run the risk of being termed anti-national and, hence, become liable to be punished. The third is the cooptation of the Dalit struggle that seeks to advance a counter articulation of self and society, in order to contain it and ultimately to marginalize it; an attempt to bring the Dalits under the total sway of brahminic hegemony. This is seen in the simultaneous efforts to absorb Dalits into Brahminism and at the same time to condemn the Dalit movement as sectarian and 'pro-British' in orientation before independence. Thus, Brahminism has assumed the right to create, define and constitute the Other.

Despite being defined, constituted and objectified by Brahminism, Dalits, adopting the Ambedkarite worldview, sought to redefine their status and as an essential part thereof strove to restructure Indian society on the basis of justice, equality and liberty. The concern for reconstructing society, a quest for egalitarian social order, has led Dalits to engage in an active critique of Brahminism, advocating the need to dismantle it. These attempts are best represented by the Dalit movement under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. It was in this movement that a broad category of the oppressed—Dalits, marginalized peasantry and working classes—had come together and effectively interrogated the structure of brahminic knowledge/power. Ambedkar provided a clear vision for dismantling Brahminism and for reconstructing Indian society.

However, in post-Ambedkar times, barring some expressions of radical Dalit assertion for dignity and some possibilities of engaging with broader emancipatory struggles of the marginalized, the educated leaders of the Dalit movement pursued the dream of political power as a panacea for addressing the Dalit question. They deliberately vulgarized Ambedkar who had exhorted them to be the ruling community in the particular context of emphasizing the importance of political power as 'a key to all problems'. Running after the mirage of political power through electoral process, necessarily led the Dalit leaders astray from meaningful emancipatory politics of the oppressed and trapped them into the ruling class net. Dalit politics and the Dalit movement were thus largely subsumed by ruling class politics.

Recently, electoral efforts of the Bahujan Samaj Party that had carved out itself from the organization of all Dalits, OBCs and religious minorities met with considerable success in the northern states. For the first time a Dalit party was catapulted to the political mainstream and captured political power in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, albeit with support from a party that claimed to share its constituency with BCs and Muslims. While this success enthralled Dalits in the state, it emboldened the BSP to pursue political power with utter ideological impunity. This has further reinforced the notion of political power (rather, electoral success) being a panacea for addressing the Dalit question. This reckless pursuit of political power, led the BSP to ally with the very same *Manuwadi* and castiest forces, the fight against whom was its declared *raison d'être*. The BSP politics in Uttar Pradesh shows that Dalits and brahminical forces have developed a fluid configuration of 'accommodation and resistance' towards each other. This experiment seeks to take place in Maharashtra in the form of unity between *Bhimshakti* (Ambedkarite forces) and *Shivshakti* (forces of the Shiv Sena) (see ch.9).

With this background, it is important to understand the dynamics of the Dalit movement that brought it to the point where the relationship of the BSP-BJP kind became a reality or Bhimshakti-Shivshakti type is more or less seriously attempted. It is also necessary to understand the implications of such formations for the broader Dalit struggle aimed at emancipation of the oppressed. The dynamics may be understood by mapping the journey of the Dalit movement in terms of the broad phases of Dalit politics: 'politics of identity', 'politics of issues', 'politics of accommodation' and 'politics of interests'. This essay attempts to argue that the imbalance between these four components essentially created the space for the Hindutva overtures. Hindutva on the other hand needed to neutralize the Dalit challenge for its Hindu Rashtra project. It contends that despite the confounding developments in contemporary politics, the marriage of convenience between the Dalit movement and Hindutva can never be consummated. The contradictions between Hindutva and Dalits are of an antagonistic nature and cannot be easily glossed over by some slogans and deceptive apparitions. Unless Hindutva forsakes its essential Hinduness, snaps its umbilical chord with its canons and aligns itself to the worldview symbolized by liberty, equality and fraternity; an impossible proposi-

tion, this alliance is not possible. On the other hand, unless Dalits give up their emancipatory aspirations, accept to live as they have lived in their preordained slots of the brahminical social order, again an impossible proposition, this alliance is unthinkable. Thus, though in the short-term the Dalit leadership may mislead the Dalits, it cannot do so for long. Lastly, it is suggested that the long-term viability of Dalit politics lies in its alliance with the forces articulating concerns of the marginalized such as peasants, workers and women.

Dalit Movement and Politics of Identity

Dalits were defined and objectified by Brahminism as 'untouchables'. Born with the stigma of Untouchability, Dalits suffered the worst forms of discrimination, various civic and religious disabilities and exploitation forcing them into dirty, demeaning, and unpaid or ill-paid forms of work. Despite this imposed designation, Dalits have sought to redefine their social status and transform the character of Indian society. The century-old Dalit movement thus exhibits this concern.

The initial concern of the Dalit movement for securing dignity and justice was expressed as the Dalit assertion for human rights. Dalits sought to enter Hindu temples in order to assert that as human beings they too had equal rights to temple-entry, denied to them through the system of Untouchability. Another expression came in the form of assertion for Dalit identity, sought to be constructed defiantly outside the framework of Brahminism through a rediscovery of Dalit history and culture located in an egalitarian order, real or imaginary, as opposed to the iniquitous brahminical social order. Thus various 'adi' movements in India, namely, 'Adi-Dharam' movement in Punjab, and 'Adi-Dravida', 'Adi-Andhra', 'Adi-Kannada' movements in South India advanced an ideological claim that Dalits were the original inhabitants of this country—*a la* sons of the soil—and belonged to a superior egalitarian cultural tradition. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, Dalit groups such as Mehtars, Bhangis, Chamars, Doms, and Jatavs claimed that they were Buddhists, questioned caste discrimination against them and asserted that they were the original inhabitants of India who were conquered by deceit and manipulations by the Brahmins coming from outside. Of course, apart from this assertion of human identity in the traditional and religious framework, rediscovery of traditions and

religiosity, the Dalit movement in later years approached the question of justice in the modern secular context.

Dalit movement and Politics of Issues

The Dalit movement in the 1930s saw a shift from temple-entry satyagrahas to rights to education, employment and political representation as necessary prerequisites for securing justice. Concluding the temple-entry satyagraha, Ambedkar pointed out that Dalits were not interested in entering temples of a religion that taught inequality and injustice as part of religious duty, and that they carried out temple-entry satyagrahas only to assert their equal humanity. He also pointed out that justice can be ensured only through education, employment and political representation. Thus the movement articulated the question of justice and dignity in the context of a modern secular framework, rather than the traditional religious mode. In terms of identity, this shift from traditional to modern can be seen also in the conversion of many Dalits to Buddhism in 1956. Buddhism, as Ambedkar conceptualized, was in consonance with the modern, secular worldview that simultaneously presented a critique of iniquitous social orders. Thus Dalits campaigned for education of Dalit children, and had to struggle to end the discriminatory attitude of teachers and school authorities. However, the question of political representation, the question of separate electorate for Dalits, brought Ambedkar to the bitter and well-known controversy with Gandhi and the Congress. This also shows that perhaps caste Hindu hegemony would have 'tolerated' Dalits entering temples, and occupying a designated space in religious structures, but Dalit assertion for a share in modern resources capable of initiating social change and thereby undermining the authority of Brahminism was visualized as a real threat to brahminical hegemony.

Thus the politics of issues, a concern for a share in the resources in modern structures (not mere acceptance and benevolence) as possible mechanism of empowerment and change was the focus of the Dalit movement. Of course, the Dalit concern for politics of issues also saw the other oppressed such as marginalized peasantry and unorganized working class as victims of exploitation and oppression. It is important to note that while other working class struggles, especially in Bombay,

were campaigning for concerns of workers in formal organized sectors, Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party (ILP) focused on unorganized sector working classes. Thus with the formation and struggles led by the ILP, the Dalit movement exhibited a concern for politics of the issues of the larger marginalized constituency, which also presented a possibility of the broader conception of the politics of emancipation.

Politics of Accommodation

Despite these early concerns with the politics of the issues of the broader marginalized constituency, the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, with an exception of Dadasaheb Gaikwad who led a satyagraha of landless agricultural labourers, came to be entrapped in the politics of accommodation. Absorbed in the Congress politics of accommodation, the Dalit movement lost its edge as a possible vehicle of the politics of the marginalized. Thus the Republican Party of India, with a tie up with the Congress, resulted in both accommodation and marginalization of Dalit politics away from its larger focus. This continues to be one of the faces of Dalit politics even today. Indeed, the emergence of Dalit Panthers led to resurgence of Dalit consciousness. Dalit youth, inspired by the Dalit Panthers, criticized 'accommodated' Dalit leadership that was ineffective in addressing the atrocities the Dalits suffered. They sought to damn the brahminical social order and dreamt of radical change leading to a just India. Moreover, the Dalit Panthers attempted to provide a broad content to the category 'Dalit' by articulating the concerns of Dalits, landless agricultural labourers, marginalized peasantry, working masses and women, and attempted to provide a broader conception of the Dalit struggle.

Despite this, the Dalit Panthers too were soon trapped in the politics of accommodation. Thus, though the Dalit Panthers presented ideologically conscious rebel Dalits, who challenged the existing Dalit leadership for being ineffective in arresting growing atrocities on Dalits and also succumbing to politics of accommodation, they themselves were soon to be accommodated and contained in the gamut of politics of interest. Moreover, despite contributing to the resurgence of Dalit consciousness that gave rise to Dalit revolt in other parts of India, in terms of acquiring political power through electoral politics, the Dalit Panthers too were unsuccessful in addressing the issues of Dalits. This

marked the shift in the Dalit agenda: from social movement of the marginalized to political formation to achieve political power for the elites among Dalits. Further, it also marked the beginning of politics of interest in Dalit politics. Political power is controlled by political parties that represent dominance of the upper castes and classes who have been appropriating Dalit votes. Hence, it was felt that Dalits should politically consolidate their votes and also assimilate other oppressed sections such as the tribals, religious minorities and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by articulating an all embracing *Bahujanwad* in opposition to *Brahmanvad*, in the realm of electoral politics. Furthermore, it was felt that only through political power in terms of seats in assemblies and parliament could the Dalits hope to change the oppressive order of Manuwad.

Politics of Interests and Politics of Issues

Such a formulation became successful in the form of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. Evolving from an interest group of Dalits working in government and public undertakings, the BSP gradually moved to become a political party with the capacity to achieve electoral success, and actually assumed political office in the largest state of India. The BSP's success in elections gave Dalits the panacea of political power: it is through the success in electoral politics that Dalits would emerge as a ruling class; and only then would they overcome their socioeconomic marginalization and combat oppressive Brahminism. Indeed, these formulations have been successful in installing a Dalit woman as the first Dalit chief minister in India, in one of its highly feudal and caste-conscious states. It has also led to the creation of certain artifacts named after leaders like Dr. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and Shahu Maharaj. However, the change initiated by these efforts has largely been limited to symbolic spaces, that has neither altered the oppressive character of the social order, nor has it brought a change in the socioeconomic status of the marginalized Dalits. Moreover, the political office too has proved to be elusive in nature.

Certainly, the BSP has emerged as an important player in Uttar Pradesh politics. However, its holding of political office in the state has depended on the support of the traditional ruling castes and classes (represented by the SP or the BJP). The latter joined hands with the BSP

insofar as it served their own interests. Whenever it did not, they have not hesitated to pull down the BSP-led governments in the state. Nevertheless, the political developments in Uttar Pradesh have led social analysts such as Christophe Jaffrelot to call it a silent revolution from below.[1] A Dalit woman leading the government of one of the most feudal and caste-ridden states, the symbolic transfer of political and bureaucratic power from the upper castes to Dalits, and the consequent psychological boost to them, indeed provides a basis for such a celebration. In reality however, the common Dalit masses continued to suffer atrocities and marginalization. Also, the BSP politics led to dampening their struggles under political expediency.

The emergence of the BSP is also paralleled by the political prominence of the BJP. By harbouring fanatic religiosity, the brahminic outfit, the RSS, finally succeeded in assuming the highest political office in India, and thereby attempted to provide a brahminical character to society and culture in the country. The political prominence of the BJP, apart from leading to fundamentalism, communalism and casteism as markers of Indian society, has also posed a challenge to both centrist (Congress) and leftist ideological persuasions. These political outfits (that are also dominated by the upper castes and upper class groups) are threatened by RSS fundamentalist and communalist politics and seeking new alliances. Thus Congress, which earlier practised politics of accommodation, now seeks the support of Dalits to fight communalism; and Left ideologues, who refused to see beyond class, have become aware of caste as a marker of oppression and exploitation in India. The result is the formulation of politics of *collective* interest.

Another form of politics of collective interest is witnessed in the BJP and the Shiv Sena enlisting support of some Dalit caste groups, especially in Maharashtra. Dalit groups such as Charmakars and Matangs, with the feeling of being ignored if not rejected by the leadership of Republican parties, and with the view of getting a share in political power, have joined these forces. This has resulted in some members of these communities being elected to legislatures and even occupying ministerial berths. Further, apart from the possibility of a share in political power, the BJP and Shiv Sena's occupation with Hindutva too found ready association among some of these Dalit castes. Thus, this too has led to formation of politics of collective interests.

Politics, Interests and Wave of Unity with Shiv Sena

In addition to the politics of collective interests, the politics of individual interests too has found a space in this formation. Often in political parties such as the BJP, Congress, Left parties and even Shiv Sena, political activists either come from stable independent economic background, or the parties create sources of empowering political activists. Some of these parties even have full-timers whose day-to-day needs are taken care of. As a result, activists are not all the time pressed for day-to-day survival, and are free and committed to work for party's ideological persuasions. Compared to this, activists in Dalit politics have been drawn from the Dalit movement, many are from Dalit Panthers, and have generally been drawn from very humble economic background. As youth inspired by Ambedkarite consciousness, and participating in struggle against Dalit atrocities, these activists left college and other professional education incomplete, and hence are without any source for day-to-day existence. Further, activists in Dalit struggle have often been elder sons of homes that have spent meagre family earnings on their education. When dreams of changing the order become more distant and inability to help even their families that need them an immediate and continuous experience, these activists tend to get frustrated. In addition to this the lack of any political recognition, despite long participation in the struggle leads them to a feeling of dejection. The author personally knows many such activists who have undergone this experience. On the other hand, like other political formations, Dalit politics too has attracted people who harbour the wish to pursue political careers. When, despite working for the party for a long time, they become unsuccessful in getting elected to a political office, they tend to look for new areas of political habitation. The recent wave of the unity of Bhimshakti and Shivshakti has roots also in these feelings and concerns.

Though the move of unity of Bhimshakti and Shivshakti sounds alluring to 'dissenting' and politically 'eager' voices among Dalit communities, its implications for long-term politics are full of perils rather than promises. For, though 'empowering' some with political office, it has dangers of new patron-client formation, ironically, emerging even in urban and modern conditions. Moreover, it also has seri-

ous implications for recovery of Dalit subjectivity and autonomy, not only in the realm of the politics but identity, culture and economy. Further, since the unity with Bhimshakti is the need of the 'hour' for Shiv Sena, it is Shiv Sena's project that decides the nature, development and outcome of this project. Such a move is dictated by the compulsions of politics of numbers, and it is these forces that determine and direct the discourse and the agenda. Thus, not only is the autonomous voice of the Dalit critique lost in such formulation, there is a danger of the Dalit remaining a perennial marginalized Other of the brahminic centre. Hence, the Dalit movement asserting autonomy of the Dalit voice in the socio-political sphere cannot be a long-term ally of the BJP and Shiv Sena forces.

At this juncture, let us try to understand why the developments within the Dalit movement have led to attempts of collaboration with ideological adversaries such as the BJP and Shiv Sena. It is also necessary to note that the political aspirations of Dalit communities outside the Ambedkarist fold, the perception of the Dalit question shared by forces advancing politics of issues such as the Left, and the feeling of loss of possibilities of sharing political power among Dalit activists, will have to be seen as factors contributing to the alliances with the ideological adversaries like the BJP and the Shiv Sena.

Earlier, we noted that Dalit assertion in the beginning of the twentieth century was expressed in the form of Dalit right to dignity and equality. Thus, various ideological 'adi' movements sought to recover Dalit history as rooted in non-brahminic egalitarian framework (see also Essay 6). However, the rise of Ambedkarism saw the question of Dalit human rights as rooted in the oppressive and exploitative structures of domination. Hence, the Dalit movement during the Ambedkarite phase pursued the politics of issues, and attempted to extend this concern to the larger marginalized categories. However, in the post-Ambedkar phase the focus of the Dalit movement came to be shifted towards securing political offices and pursuing issues of identity. As a result, the Dalit movement lost connections with the issues confronting both Dalit masses and other marginalized sections. Here it should be highlighted that the efforts and strength of the Dalit movement was spent on struggling with the traditional issues of the practice of Untouchability and caste discrimination. The growing conscious-

ness among Dalit masses, both in rural and urban areas, and assertion against the oppressive caste system gave rise to further cases of atrocities, caste discrimination and social boycott, which forced the struggle to engage with the issues of discrimination accentuated by the upper-caste reaction. This is also a telling comment on the nature of caste rigidities and prevalence of caste consciousness even in Maharashtra, which is seen as a land of rationalist, reformist and even working class movements. Indeed, the Dalit Panthers did try to infuse a new consciousness and attempted to provide a broader content to the category 'Dalit'. However, in the absence of a stable organized structure, the Dalit Panthers also became victims of the politics of appropriation. Some of its leaders tried to share political space with the Congress, whereas others have ironically seen possibilities in the Shiv Sena. Political parties such as the Congress, Shiv Sena and BJP are keen to share political space with the Dalits. Such a concern of course, emanates more from the lure of Dalit votes rather than any commitment to annihilate the traditional caste order. Moreover, it has contributed to the creation of competitive claims for representing Dalit communities, which in turn has led to fragmentation of the Dalit movement and thereby weakening of the possibility of the politics of issues.

On the other hand, political formations claiming allegiance to the Left ideology and attempting to articulate the politics of issues have shared a problematic relationship with the Dalit movement. Though many Dalit youth are active in Left political formations and the Left has also recognized caste as a context of oppression, Left politics has traditionally seen Dalit movement as sectarian, anti-national and divisive in character. Moreover, ideologically Left parties have privileged the category of class over that of caste as sites of exploitation and oppression; and also as a source of revolutionary politics. Thus the Left formations saw class as a subsuming category and held that the class struggle alone would lead to revolutionary politics. There is ground to believe that such a refusal to recognize caste as a site of oppression and exploitation was the result of the Left ideologues' social location. On the other hand, Dalit activists engaged against the discrimination ignored the fact that such discrimination can also emanate afrom the exploitative and oppressive structures in the realm of economics. In this situation, there is a need to reinvent the politics of emancipation.

Reinventing Politics of Emancipation

Let me end by attempting to articulate the concerns of Dalit politics in the times to come. In 1938, while speaking before G.I.P. railway workers in Manmad, Dr. Ambedkar had pointed out that Dalit and marginalized sections of this country would have to fight against two enemies: Brahminism and Capitalism. Ambedkar's attempts to articulate and campaign for these issues through the Independent Labour Party indicated the form of possible emancipatory politics Dalits ought to engage with. What is more, in contemporary times both these enemies have emerged as threats to life and dignity in social, economic, political and even cultural spheres, and have contributed to the process of disenfranchisement. The economic changes that have taken place under the process of globalization are adversely affecting lives of agricultural labourer, marginal peasants, workers in unorganized sectors in urban areas and women. As a result of the withdrawal of the state from key social sectors and growing erosion of the state support structures in these areas, marginalized people have little hope in managing survival, let alone the possibilities of positive progress.

The Dalit population comprises bulk of these categories. Hence Dalit politics today has to focus on the issues of the marginalized sections such as landless agricultural workers, poor peasantry, unorganized sector workers, urban poor and women, and specifically on the issues confronting Dalit women, who have been victims of intersecting ideologies and structures of patriarchy, gender and caste. Though the participation of Dalit women in the Dalit movement has always been significant, issues confronting them have not become central to the Dalit struggle. These ought to be the priorities of Dalit politics in contemporary times. Similarly, like the oppressive processes of globalization, the emergence of Hindutva has led to a cultural hegemonic formation assuming the centre that dictates and polices for the Other. This presents a threat to the social and cultural autonomy of the religious minorities and the lower castes Again, Dalits as critics of asymmetrical formations and contributors to the alternative egalitarian culture have engaged with hegemonic Hindutva. The concern with politics of emancipation could be seen in the Ambedkarite conceptualization of culture of resistance and reconstitution. Through his re-articulation of Buddhism as located in a critical space of ethical

reconstruction, Ambedkar sought to recover the subjective agency of the subjugated in critiquing the ideologies and structures of domination on the one hand, and in reconstructing of social order on the foundations of justice, reason and autonomy on the other. In an atmosphere of growing disenfranchising, the critical space that 'modernist' Buddhism offers, provides a context for emancipatory politics. Certainly, such a concern warrants a perspective of Buddhism as rooted in 'materiality and ethicality of human life', as in the 'real' conditions that characterize human existence.

Such an emancipatory agenda can not be realized unless those offering the politics of issues, affecting the marginalized sections, for instance, the Left and other progressive forces, become sensitive to the specificities of oppression and exploitation resulting from the structure of caste. They need to realize that social locations dictated by caste not only influence identities and culture but also the economic, social and political dimensions. Caste thus is not mechanically located in the superstructure, but this superstructure often interacts with, and influences, the base. Often those who voice the issues of the marginalized from class and patriarchal (feminist) axes exhibit an ideological arrogance, a sense of superiority in articulation and legitimization of issues. However, the very fact that issues of identity, ethnicity and communalism have assumed a central place in social discourse prove that homogenized and unproblematic views of class and patriarchy as social markers have been untenable in understanding social processes. The same perhaps holds true in regard to the environmental politics in India, which often is blind to politics and relationship of caste and resources. Thus, broader and collaborative politics based on issues, commitment to the concerns of the marginalized rooted in genuine democratic ethos, a genuine, not procedural, democracy that privileges the issues of justice and human dignity will contribute to the politics of emancipation.

Note

1. Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London: Hurst, 2003).

PART II

Hindutva in Operation

9

Subverting the *Shudra–Ati-Shudra* Revolution: The Uttar Pradesh Way

Subhash Gatade

Introduction

Politics in Uttar Pradesh presents a kaleidoscopic picture to close watchers. It could be said that the 1980s and early 1990s have been harbingers of change in the state's polity. This period, after the fall of the Congress majority government in 1989, is marked by the emergence of new social forces and formations on the scene and the various permutations-combinations they engaged in supposedly to provide a stable ruling arrangement. At present a coalition government led by Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, which is the dominant constituent of the coalition, is holding the reins of power. It has succeeded the coalition government of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party led by Mayawati. Indeed, the replacement of the government in Uttar Pradesh led by the 'Dalit ki Beti', Mayawati, by the one led by the 'Dharti Putra', Mulayam Singh Yadav, has not been a smooth affair.

The abrupt end of the third experiment in cohabitation between the party of Hindutva and the Bahujan formation, precipitated by the alleged irregularities committed in the 'Taj Corridor Case' has definitely given rise to bickering between the two. The party of Hindutva had declared that it had been betrayed by the Bahujan formation and hence it would teach a lesson to their erstwhile ally. The General Elections of 2004, however, proved Mayawati, the indomitable leader of the Bahujan formation, right; BJP was nearly routed in the state. Mayawati had announced that she would not rest till she had dethroned the Hindutva formation from the citadels of power in Delhi.

It is worth noting that within a span of just eight years the Bahujan formation has entered into a power-sharing arrangement at the state level with the Hindutva formation three times. The first experiment lasted for a period of four and half months, the second experiment went on for a period of six months, while the third experiment lasted the longest, for a period of one year and three months. The complex interplay of both the formations can be understood also from the fact that it is in the same period that the Bahujan formation played a key role in the defeat of the Hindutva party at the centre.

The alliance of both these formations and its convoluted trajectory has led to many theories from analysts. While scholars like Christophe Jafferlot seem to be looking more sympathetically towards this experiment, another close watcher of the whole scenario, Gail Omvedt, seems to be unspairing in her criticism. Can it be called a 'tactical alliance', to quote Christophe Jafferlot,[1] on part of the Bahujan formation or is it a sheer 'opportunist alliance' if one refers to Gail Omvedt,[2] with the sole purpose of power sharing? Definitely no simple answers are possible. It is time to take a look at the genesis of the Bahujan formation, the rationale provided by it to further its alliance with one of those *Manuwadi* organizations, the way it has helped or hampered the Hindutva combine and also the way in which it has impacted upon the short-term and long-term prospects of the project of Dalit emancipation.

Enter the Bahujans!

The term 'Bahujan' (literally 'broad masses') had been coined quite earlier but was brought into fresh circulation by one of the lesser known social reformers from Maharashtra, namely, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, whose work spanned the early part of the twentieth century. It is a fact that this formulation is an extension of the way in which the great social revolutionary of the nineteenth century, Mahatma Phule, differentiated the broad masses of the Shudras and Ati-Shudras from the *Shetjis* and *Bhattjis* (the moneylenders and the brahmins). Certainly V. R. Shinde would never have envisaged that the term popularized by him would one day come to define the grammar of the Indian polity. It is also true that even in post-independence India, the term remained dormant for decades. But with the arrival of new social forces on the

scene during the last two decades there has been a revival of its usage. Rather, it can be said that the term has returned with a vengeance.

Ranging from the political establishment, to civil society or from media to academia, its relevance is being acknowledged everywhere. The concerns raised by this section of the population have suddenly gained acceptance. Formations on the political arena are vying with each other either to reformulate their agendas to coopt this new understanding of the realpolitik or are desperately in search of alliances with similar formations so that these are able to expand their influence from their traditional bases. Today we are witness to a party bearing this name catapulting onto national politics and becoming the fourth largest political party in Indian politics. There is, however, no denying the fact that the abrupt end of the BSP's power-sharing alliance with the BJP in Uttar Pradesh precipitated by the alleged irregularities committed in the 'Taj corridor case' has put brakes on its forward march.

Gone are the days when political pundits looked on with ridicule, as happened in the mid-1980s, when its rumblings were witnessed on the streets when people carrying blue flags on their cycles toured the whole country with the apt slogans: '*Vote Hamara, Raj Tumhara, Nahin Chalega*' (our votes and your rule, will work no more); '*Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagidari*' (as your numbers, so your share); or raised slogans like '*Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Inko Maro Jute Char*' (see n14). It is worth underlining that with the bloody communal and fascist politics of the Sangh Parivar acting as a backdrop and the neo-liberal economic policies further accelerating the process of marginalization of the people, this whole phenomenon of Dalit assertion under the discourse of Bahujans has added a new vigour/vitality to the otherwise grim scenario and definitely added a new dimension to the unfolding political transformations at the fag end of the twentieth century.

The phenomenon of the rise of the Bahujans in a span of less than 10 years and their ability to redefine the grammar of Indian politics has also brought in its wake fresh doubts, questions, apprehensions about the future direction of the Ambedkarite movement in post-Ambedkar times. Concern is also expressed over the fact that whether the radical transformatory potential of the Ambedkarite vision would then get dissipated in the morass of electoral politics. It is also being asked whether getting political power by any means whatever can re-

ally bring about Dalit emancipation. Recounting Ambedkar's constant refrain about the possible negative impact of 'Hindu Rashtra/Raj' on the Dalit scenario, doubts are also being raised over the 'necessity' of the 'tactical alliance' with the party of Hindutva albeit for a short period. It is being noted that lack of interaction with Left politics ingrained in this Bahujan phenomenon has for the time being scuttled all possibilities of dialogue between the various shades of the Left formations and the rising tide of Dalit assertion.[3]

Of late, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a key centre of the unfolding dynamic of Bahujan politics. It is also worth noting that it was in the same period in which Uttar Pradesh evolved as an epicentre of the movements led by the Hindutva Brigade for the 'liberation of Ram Janmbhoomi' that the state also became a fertile ground to what is known in popular parlance as the 'forward march of the backwards'. It is high time that one took a dispassionate look at what happened in this state over the unfolding juggernaut of *Bahujanwad*, its critical engagement with the polity and society in general and with the forces of Hindutva in particular. But before we come to the actual unfolding of Bahujanwad, it would be opportune to understand the short-term and long-term agendas of the Hindutva forces which had been served by its engagement with the Bahujan phenomenon.

Fear of the Shudra Revolution?

> The measure of its success in uniting such victims of Brahmanism can be assessed from the fears of the RSS. The annual reports of the RSS released on 15 March, 1985, devoted a full para to such a success of the BSP in uniting the oppressed and exploited caste groups and securing brotherhood against them . . . In the eyes of the RSS such a success of the BSP is the greatest danger to the Hindu fundamentalist. Kanshi Ram *(Oppressed Indian*, April 1985)

> Bahujan Samaj Party, one of the real problems for RSS in north India. Balasaheb Deoras (Quoted in *Illustrated Weekly of India, 14 Aug 1988)*

> There is today an urgent need to build up moral and spiritual forces to counter any fall out from an expected Shudra revolution. M. V. Kamath, *The Organiser*, 1 May 1994, p.6 (commenting on the SP-BSP victory in UP elections)

Hindutva has an uncanny similarity to brahminical Hinduism, which holds together under its canopy a plethora of sects, opinions with a system of graded inequality based on purity and pollution properly in place and keeping the core values/agendas intact. Hindutva has also demonstrated tremendous flexibility and innovativeness in cobbling together an alliance of outfits which may be working at cross purposes with each other but have no qualms in sticking together. While at the level of its own organizations, it has evolved a plethora of formations from the 'missionary' RSS to the 'lunatic fringe' Bajrang Dal, it has skilfully extended this experience to the field of politics. It will be a study of sorts to unravel how Hindutva has been able to rope in the 'secular' Chandrababu Naidu on the one hand and the 'fascist' Shiv Sena on the other, thereby expanding its political influence and widening the appeal of its agenda. The party of the Hindutva has similarly maintained a love-hate relationship with the party of the Bahujans, namely, the Bahujan Samaj Party.

As far as the last and the recently ended alliance with the Bahujan formation was concerned, in the unfolding Uttar Pradesh scenario which emerged after the assembly elections in 2002, a hung assembly provided a unique opportunity to arrest the BJP downslide and simultaneously to gain further stability for the coalition government at the Centre. And thus despite opposition for such an alliance from an influential section within its party at the state level, it preferred to become a junior partner in the Bahujan-led government. But apart from the short-term power-sharing benefit and a possibility of reaping electoral dividends in the forthcoming elections, there were few other important considerations which had less serious import immediately. It is clear that the Hindutva forces have never ascribed any importance to the subaltern classes, especially the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. They have demonstrated their admiration for the *Manusmriti* (the Laws of Manu), the religious code of conduct revered by the upper caste Hindus which legitimized and sanctified the inhuman status accorded to

the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. They have displayed utter disdain for any kind of independent Dalit movement. It is interesting to note that the mouthpiece of the Sangh Parivar had even opposed the formulation of the Constitution on a secular basis and had even advocated the acceptance of the *Manusmriti* as India's Constitution (see Essay 1). It needs to be noted that the hatred towards any independent movement of the Dalits was one of the causes which prompted the founders of the RSS to establish the organization.[4] Their diabolical game vis-à-vis rising Dalit consciousness is apparent in the way the treatment they meted out to Ambedkar, one of the greatest leaders of the oppressed and exploited and a pioneer of the independent Dalit movement.

It is a fact that during his lifetime and even after his demise, Ambedkar was anathema to the Hindutva forces. Their ideologues never felt comfortable either with Ambedkar's uncompromising struggle against the graded inequality legitimized and sanctified by Hindu religion or with his call to the oppressed and depressed to come forward to 'capture' political power. The very fact that Ambedkar announced his decision to renounce Hindu religion in the 1930s, which he ultimately implemented by embracing Buddhism in the mid-1950s could never be digested by the Sangh fraternity. The Hindutva forces never lost an opportunity to denigrate him and his politics even during his lifetime. Their joining hands with other reactionary elements in opposing the 'Hindu Code Bill' which Dr. Ambedkar piloted and their attempts to remove the protective discrimination granted to the Dalits and tribals in the Constitution have been noted and are two glaring examples which show the real intentions of the Hindutva brigade.[5] A change in the approach of the Sangh Parivar towards Dalits and Ambedkar came about during the reign of Sangh Supremo Balasaheb Deoras. An event signifying this change was the first ever visit by Deoras or any other top functionaries of the Sangh to the Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur where Dr.Ambedkar had embraced Buddhism way back in 1956. It was in continuation of this changed approach that a Dalit was asked to conduct the 'shilapujan' ceremony during the Babri Masjid 'liberation' movement. The programme organized in Ayodhya by the Sangh Parivar on the first anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition day also witnessed a large portrait of Ambedkar apart from other stalwarts of the Hindutva Brigade adorning the stage.

The Hindutva ideologues have rightly perceived that a broader anti-upper caste front comprising of the backwards, Dalits as well as the minorities could prove to be their nemesis. Such an alliance not only explodes the myth of the 'monolithic Hindu identity' but has also the possibility of becoming so formidable that it could marginalize their well-cultivated Hindutva project once again. Their statements quoted earlier, tell us about their fear about the future of the Bahujan project. Their fears were really vindicated when they found that the SP-BSP alliance won power in Uttar Pradesh in 1993 despite the biggest post-independence communal mobilization, centred on the Babri Masjid undertaken by them. And from day one their sole attempt was to drive a wedge between this alliance.

The third consideration pertained to further consolidation of the unity of the Dalits with its own, mainly upper caste, base against the resurgent middle castes or backward castes (a repeat of the truncated Brahmin-Harijan-Muslim axis forged by the Congress in its heydays). The idea was that if it worked in Uttar Pradesh then the experiment could be extended to other states as well. Their alliance with a party with Dalit concerns as its core was also an attempt to present itself in a 'positive light' before the Dalit masses. This would help remove the 'label' of the 'A' team of Manuwadis which was peddled by the leaders of the Bahujan formation. It also was an endeavour to coopt the rising Dalit assertion and also to *hindutvaise* militant Dalit consciousness.

Towards A 'Bahujan Raj'

> Kanshi Ram's strategy and his larger understanding of social change are now considerably evolved. He no longer believes in the primacy of social reform. Rather, expenditure of effort on any object other than the capture of government power is seen to be superfluous. It is administrative power that will bring about desired social change.[6]

Before coming to the details of the alliance of the Bahujan formation with the forces of Hindutva and its overall impact on the politics of Dalit assertion, it would be opportune to take a look at the way the intervention by Kanshi Ram has impacted the post-Ambedkar Dalit

movement. The ups and downs through which Dalit politics passed after the death of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar can be broadly divided into three phases: *(i)* the rise and fall of the Republican Party; *(ii)* the emergence of the Dalit Panthers; and *(iii)* the growing assertion of Dalits for political power and their consequent refusal to remain satisfied merely with education and job opportunities arising out of reservations. The impressive intervention of the BSP under Kanshi Ram in national politics underlines this third stage. It is noteworthy that while in the earlier two stages in the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, the aspect of 'social-cultural movement' and the unfolding Dalit politics in Maharashtra guided its orientation, its role has been increasingly marginalized in the third stage. The success achieved by the BSP has certainly encouraged the emergence of similar experiments in different parts of the country.

For Kanshi Ram, the term 'Bahujan' comprises the entire 85 percent of the population ranging from the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and religious minorities who are being oppressed by the 'Brahminical Social Order' (BSO). It is noteworthy to quote Kanshi Ram, 'it was by strongly denouncing the "era of stooges" and those "who were enjoying at the feet of the Brahminicals"'—his description of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement—that he charted a path with an aim to 'make the Bahujan Samaj a ruling Samaj of India'.[7] According to Kanshi Ram, unless and until 85 percent people become the ruling samaj, atrocities against them cannot be stopped. One could easily dispute this simplistic arithmetic that attempts another kind of homogenization of all the non-brahmin castes against Brahmins as though there were no contradictions between them. The empirical evidence goes contrary to this formulation; the OBCs—the powerful section of the bahujan component of the BSP—are the main perpetrators of atrocities on Dalits all over the country and veritable baton holders of Brahminism.[8] But that is beside the point; Kanshi Ram and the BSP have demonstrated the viability of their constituency at least in Uttar Pradesh.

At the social level, the whole concept of Bahujanwad has evolved in such a manner that it has tried to weave an alliance of the people oppressed under the Brahminical Social Order, keeping the Dalit assertion at the core and has made itself a sizeable force, at least in Uttar Pradesh. At the political level, the pioneers of Bahujan politics have

worked out electoral alliances with forces which were not favourably disposed towards them.[9] A cursory glance at the political developments in Uttar Pradesh in the decade gone by would make it clear that it entered into pre-poll/post-poll alliances with three different formations. It formed a pre-poll alliance with the Samajwadi Party and thus could enjoy fruits of power albeit for a short time (1993-95). With the fall of this government because of withdrawal of support by the BSP, emerged the possibility of a government led by Mayawati herself with support from the BJP. The first experiment in government formation with the BJP lasted, as mentioned earlier, for four and a half months.

When the elections to the next assembly were held the BSP entered into a pre-poll alliance with the Congress where it was the senior partner of the alliance (1996). After the elections the BSP entered into an alliance with the BJP for a second time when Mayawati was made a chief minister for a period of six months and it was decided to put the post on rotation. After her turn as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh was over, the BSP withdrew its support to the Kalyan Singh ministry on charges of soft pedaling the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocity) Act. The BSP's third alliance with the BJP for sharing power in Uttar Pradesh resulted in Mayawati occupying the chief minister's chair for the third time till the alliance ended abruptly in August 2003.

Neither the BSP's alliance with the Samajwadi Party nor its pre-poll alliance with Congress in 1996 was repeated again. However, the BSP opted to go in for an alliance with the BJP at the state level three times. The same BSP had earlier played a key role in the defeat of the Vajpayee-led government at the centre when the no confidence motion against the government was moved by the combined opposition in the Twelfth Lok Sabha in 1998. What can be said to be main consideration of the BSP in forming an alliance with the A team of Manuwadis, namely, the BJP?[10]

As mentioned earlier, the key aim in BSP politics is accession to power. Ambedkar's call that 'Dalits will have to become the ruling community' is literally used by the BSP and its supremo, Kanshi Ram. Bahujanwad for the BSP is an attempt to build a counter-hegemony to the Brahminical Social Order with the perception that only through political power could a qualitative change be brought about in the lives of the Bahujans. And as Kanshi Ram has underlined time and again, he has no hassles in forming and breaking alliances even with Manuwadi

formations if it serves the purpose of installing a Bahujan regime albeit for a short period.[11] It would be necessary to look into the short-term and long term impacts of such an alliance on the Dalit consciousness in particular and the Dalit liberation movement in general.

Unleashing the Dalit Agenda

> *'Ladke Lenge PM, CM; Arakshan se Lenge SP* [Superintendent of Police], *DM* [District Magistrate]'
>
> —Slogan raised in BSP rallies

It needs to be remembered that the first experiment in cohabitation of the BSP with the BJP ended in four and half months because of the supposedly aggressive pushing of the Dalit agenda by the BSP which started ringing alarm bells in the BJP camp. The second experiment of cohabitation lasted just six months when the BSP itself withdrew support to Kalyan Singh for soft-pedalling on the SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and the third experiment in cohabitation had an abrupt ending within a span of a year and a few months. A brief analysis of all these experiments in cohabitation would give one an idea of the way the agenda of 'Bahujan Raj' with core Dalit concerns unfolded itself in Uttar Pradesh. One can classify the measures undertaken by the BSP while in power in three broad categories.

Legal measures

Strict implementation of the law, especially focusing on Dalits with special attempts to put an end to the atrocities on Dalits; help distribute land to the Dalits due to them, and broadening the ambit of reservation.

Social-Cultural measures

Launching of the Ambedkar Udyan project, installation of Ambedkar's statues, holding of fairs in the name of Bahujan warriors and saints, and so on.

Strict administration

Mayawati has cultivated the impression of a no-nonsense, tough administrator through frequent postings of bureaucrats and promoting her supporters in the bureaucracy to replace upper caste officers. Incidentally the assumption of power by Mayawati in 1995 with BJP's support had many firsts to its credit. It symbolized not only that a Dalit woman had become chief minister of the largest state for the first time but also that she was a member of a political party which was not dominated by upper castes and had a Dalit agenda at its core. Till then, in the long span of more than 50 years of Indian democracy, Dalits had occupied the chair of chief ministership only thrice. The earlier three chief ministers, namely, in Andhra, Rajasthan and Bihar, all belonged to parties which were more or less dominated by the upper castes or the rising middle castes. Ironically, it was also for the first time in the history of independent India that a party proclaiming Ambedkar's legacy had entered into an alliance with a Hindutva fascist party which had consistently opposed independent assertion by Dalits and had tried its best to 'stall the Shudra revolution'.

Her first stint of power demonstrated the 'distinctness' of the intervention of the Bahujan formation in the overall polity. Carving out of new districts and renaming them with names from the Bahujan legacy or renaming of universities, holding *melas* in the name of Periyar—(a persona non grata for the Sangh Parivar), special emphasis on the development of Ambedkar villages where the population of the Dalits was around 30 percent, creating grants for Dalit children to attend classes, allocating 27 percent of the state budget for the OBCs and permitting the benefit of reservations for low caste Muslims—these were some of the measures taken by her regime. It was also during this period that the Mayawati government did not allow the VHP to organize an important function at Mathura in September 1995 which would have precipitated communal tensions further, despite the fact that it was receiving support from the BJP.[12] Interestingly, the installation of Ambedkar statues all over the state which received a new impetus with Mayawati's assumption of the chief minister's chair had started like a movement with the coming into power of the first SP-BSP government itself. The growing Dalit assertion which manifested itself through

this symbolic action led to conflict at various places between the Dalits and the upper or dominant castes. According to *India Today* (10 April 1994, p. 56) over a period of four months 60 incidents linked with the installation of statues led to 21 casualties among the Dalits. Mayawati's assumption of power as chief minister gave a fillip to all such efforts with the announcement that an Ambedkar Udyan would be built in an area of 28 acres in Lucknow which would be dedicated to Bharat Ratna Dr. Ambedkar.

The second experiment in cohabitation with the BJP started in the year 1997 when no party won a clear majority in the assembly elections. The state of Uttar Pradesh was under President's Rule for six months. The BSP-BJP shared power for the second time with an agreement that the chief ministership would be rotated between the two parties. In many ways it was a continuation of the BSP's efforts to strengthen its base and the BJP's effort to retain its dwindling support. The BSP continued from a point which it had left off when it was last in power and restarted those projects which it had earlier undertaken and further gave a fresh impetus to new projects by implementing schemes, enforcing laws which would benefit its core base of Dalits. An interesting feature of this period is the way special attention was paid to the land rights of the Dalits.[13] Attempts were made in this period to give *pattas* which had earlier been allotted to Dalits; there were 1,58,000 beneficiaries among whom 1,20,000 acres of land was distributed. A special campaign was taken up to give new pattas to 81,500 more Dalits with 52,379 acres of land. Two additional features of this campaign were: to stop the eviction of 20,000 Dalits from 15,000 acres of village land they had previously occupied and also to regularize those *pattedars* who were occupying for more than 10 years.[14]

The third period of cohabitation with the BJP which started in 2002 and which ended abruptly in August 2003 was initially marked by eagerness from both sides to cater to each other's interests with the aim of continuing the alliance and not to take any precipitate action. Taking into consideration the apprehensions of the mainly upper caste core constituency of the BJP, the government had in a G.O. (Government Order) directed that the SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act should be used only in cases of rape and murder of Dalits. It is worth noting that the earlier two experiments were marked by strict implementation

of this very SC/ST Act and its non-implementation had became a ground for Mayawati to withdraw support to Kalyan Singh when he became a chief minister for a period of six months. The BSP's by and large soft-pedalling of the activities of the 'lunatic fringe' of the Sangh Parivar to buy peace should also be noted.[15] It was during this period that Mayawati invited Advani to participate in a BSP rally and instead of issuing a fresh notification in the Babri Masjid demolition case, she had the case transferred to Rae Bareilly Sessions Court. And thus Bajrang Dal was freely engaged in giving arms training to the 'militant Hindu Youth', Praveen Togadia, the International General Secretary of the VHP was not prohibited from organizing 'Trishul Deeksha Samarohs' and the incidents of terrorizing of the Christian missionaries went on unabated. Instead of taking any stringent action against Hindutva forces, the government focused action on the activities of gangs/groups associated with the oppositional formations. While there were no restrictions on the activities of the lunatic fringe of the Hindutva brigade, every attempt was being made to stifle the voice of the secular and democratic forces.[16] It cannot be denied that all these moves were part of a well-thought out strategy which the BSP had planned in advance. Mayawati's giving a clean chit to Narendra Modi after the Gujarat genocide or her campaigning for him in Gujarat in the last assembly elections of 2002 acted as a 'curtain raiser' for things yet to come.

Apart from its soft dealing with the communal groups, the Bahujan formation was also engaged in slowly de-emphasizing its Bahujan identity and the Kanshi Ram and Mayawati duo have been emphasizing its *sarva jan* line and have slowly and subtly put its Bahujan agenda on the backburner.[17] In the last elections to the Uttar Pradesh assembly, a slogan raised by the BSP demonstrated its eagerness as well as its compulsion to break out of its Bahujan mould: *Hathi Nahin Ganesh Hai! Brahma Vishnu Mahesh Hai!* (which literally translated means: that the hathi or the elephant, the BSP's symbol, is not simply an elephant but the Hindu elephant god Ganesh along with Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh—the Hindu triumvirate symbolizing Creator, Defender and Destroyer).

One can notice the way in which a concerted attempt was being made to win over the Hindus, especially the upper castes, and also to communicate to them that the BSP is a formation which can accommodate everyone. In tune with de-emphasizing its 'Bahujan' agenda, it

distributed more tickets to the upper castes in the last assembly elections in 2002. The electoral outcome also vindicates this change in emphasis because only a quarter of the successful candidates were Dalits. At this juncture it is difficult to say what will happen next in the relationship between the BSP and the BJP. Apparently the acts of commission and omission committed during the controversial Taj Corridor project precipitated the present low in the relationship between these two allies. It is also true that a vocal section within the state BJP had consistently opposed the alliance with the BSP and this viewpoint prevailed in precipitating the crisis. But there are strong currents within the BJP which are keen to bring the BSP back to their fold. And that is why despite the formal posturing from both the sides, it will not be proper to say that it is the 'end of the road' for such an alliance to emerge for the fourth time.

Looking Back

How does one evaluate the nearly two-decade-old trajectory of the Bahujan formation in Uttar Pradesh? How does one look at its alliance with the forces of Hindutva which it formed supposedly to further its agenda? As already mentioned, the advent of the BSP on the national scene in general and in Uttar Pradesh politics in particular has become a harbinger of a 'new phase' in the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement. It is a fact that it has not only helped reinvigorate the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement but has simultaneously widened its ambit in a qualitative manner. It is history that with the growing 'fractionization' of the Dalit movement after the demise of Ambedkar, the whole movement had landed itself in such a sorry state that Dalit politicians or Dalit parties were content with playing (in the words of Gopal Guru) 'guest actor' roles in the upper caste dominated parties. It has not only successfully tried to get out of the 'single caste' status of the earlier Dalit formations experiments or their 'guest actor appearances' on the political scene, but it has also skilfully tried to weave together a formidable alliance of 'oppressed castes and religious minorities' trying to keep the core agenda of Dalit assertion intact.

A significant achievement of the unfolding juggernaut of Bahujanwad has been that it has ably demonstrated that the whole idea of the homogenized Hindu majority which the Hindutva fascists want

to peddle for their immediate as well as long-term ends is a myth. The project of Hindutva which not only wanted to hegemonize the many forms of Hinduism in practice or homogenize the many 'little traditions' in existence has been challenged effectively. It has also demonstrated that if the need arises the Hindutva mythology can be burst asunder if proper coalitions of castes take place. It is also a fact that it has broken the stranglehold of the upper castes on Uttar Pradesh politics which were ruling the roost till the late 1980s. The changed ambience in the state's politics can be gauged from the fact that the BJP and the Congress, two upper caste-dominated parties, are finding themselves in a blind alley and are still struggling to find their new bearings in the changed circumstances. It is not for nothing that both these parties had sent feelers to the backward caste leader and ex-chief minister, Kalyan Singh, to join their parties. It is another matter that ultimately the BJP, the party which wears discipline on its sleeves, succeeded in roping this one time rebel back to its fold.

As already discussed, the political ascendance of a formation with Dalit agenda has not only helped raise the self-esteem and self-respect of the most downtrodden in Indian society, it has also given a new momentum to the processes of their empowerment at the grass-root level. Redefinition of the relationship between the erstwhile dominated and the dominant castes has taken various forms, ranging from the struggles over putting statues of Ambedkar in public places to the fight over illegal occupation of lands allotted to the Dalits by the dominant castes. There is also no denying the fact that the practice of going in for pre-poll or post-poll alliances has been successfully used by the BSP to its advantage. In a span of just ten years it has formed alliances with three altogether different formations and has seen to the expansion of its own mass base. It is worth noting that its alliance with the BJP has benefited it in no uncertain terms—not only in electoral terms but also at a broader level whereas in contrast the BJP's situation has gone from bad to worse.[18]

The story of the unfolding dynamic of Bahujanwad or its engagement with Hindutva does not end here. Apart from the significant achievements to its credit, there are a few issues over which the Bahujan formation has either followed the beaten track or has failed to show the necessary vision to address them or has kept itself confined to 'opportunist manoeuvrings' supposedly for its short-term interests. A

key question concerns the whole concept of 'Bahujan' itself and its getting established at the social level. Definitely the idea of 'Bahujan' has proved politically sustainable but it has not taken roots nor seems to be taking roots at the social level. For any such concept to take root there would be a need for reinvigorating the social-cultural aspect in the movement with a special focus on the anti-caste struggle. Unless and until the caste barriers are broken and the structured hierarchy legitimated and sanctified by religion is done away with, it is difficult to carve out a Bahujan identity from the multiversity of oppressed identities.

But it is also true that at another level, this new phase has proved to be yet another 'opportunity lost' for a resurgent Dalit movement. Indeed, it has proved to be the most unscrupulous game played on Dalits and can be seen as the worst vulgarization of Ambedkar's vision. An independent political observer would conclude that the way the 'Taj corridor case' unfolds itself is going to prove to be a dividing line for the future of the Bahujan party. It can also be said that the proceedings in this case are going to prove to be the nemesis of the BSP from which it would be difficult for it to recover. With a considerably weakened and ailing Kanshi Ram in hospital and Mayawati's game for power and money getting exhausted, it has definitely lost the initiative which it had in the 'pre-Taj corridor' period. And if it survives it will be only as a supporter of some or the other party in power. With no organizational structure worth the name and a second line of leadership absent, it would be difficult for the party to move ahead with the same vigour, especially if a few BSP leaders are indicted in the Taj corridor case.

It can easily be seen that while the alliance for power-sharing with the BJP has brought electoral dividends to the Bahujan formation and it has been able to widen its base, this has also affected its long-term prospects of continuing its struggle against Brahminism and has made it an ally with a communal fascist formation whose hands are soaked with the blood of the minorities and Dalits. As already pointed out, it has helped legitimize the most brutal force in Indian politics, namely, the Hindutva brigade, which ruled the country for a number of years till it was dismissed by the electorate in the 2004 General Elections. The most disturbing fallout of such a political alliance is that it has willy-nilly made the Dalits appear as allies of the Hindutva brigade. This has serious ramifications for the movement for social change in

this country. Putting aside all those warnings which Dr. Ambedkar gave regarding the prospects before the Dalits and other oppressed sections in case a 'Hindu Raj' becomes a reality, putting aside all those struggles which he and the other leaders of the movement for Dalit emancipation waged against Brahminism, an outfit which did reinvigorate the Dalit movement in critical times, has had no compunction in embracing the same forces of Brahminism under the compulsions of realpolitik. It is also clear that the 'short-term successes' achieved by the Bahujan formation through the skilful utilization of alliance making and transfer of 'vote bank' have instead created illusions among the oppressed sections about the effectiveness of the electoral path.

It is worth noting that a few intellectuals have claimed that the Ambedkarian legacy has provided theoretical justification for the unity of the BSP and the BJP, and also claimed that for the Dalits 'social fascism' of the backwards is more dangerous than the 'communal fascism' of the Parivar. According to them, the upper castes, which the BJP represents, are a declining force in rural areas and for the Dalits, a majority of whom are still village-bound, an alliance with them would provide immediate security. Of course, a few Dalit activists have debunked the rationale provided for the BSP and BJP alliance and they have produced statistics which show that during the last decade, the Dalits were under attack more at the hands of the upper castes, especially the Rajputs, as compared to the backwards. They also debunk the theory of social fascism (implicit violence against the Dalits by the upper castes) being more dangerous than communal fascism (explicit violence against the minority communities) as just a 'post-facto justification' for a basically opportunist alliance which does not take into consideration the divisions within the ranks of the backwards as well as the Dalits.

What Next?

It can be said that the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement is passing through one of its most crucial phases since the death of Ambedkar. It can be said with a sense of achievement that today there is a broader

acceptance of the ideas of Phule-Ambedkar, even in the mainstream. It can also be said that even in the broad spectrum of the Left movement there is greater appreciation of the struggle against Brahminism as well as patriarchy and a sincere attempt is underway to review and reconsider the earlier mechanical understanding around caste and gender. On the other hand, the successors of the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar are finding themselves in a vortex for which they themselves are partially responsible.

The central question which needs to be understood is that there has been a 'vulgarization' of Ambedkar's method in the Dalit movement which clearly manifests itself in the way interconnections between political struggles and struggles on socio-cultural questions and economic struggles are understood and implemented. While it is true that Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the need for making the Dalits the 'ruling community' and that he underscored the need to tackle the question of Untouchability as basically a political question, it must be remembered that throughout his life he never drew a fictitious Chinese wall between political struggles and other struggles. For him, all these struggles formed part of the transformation he wanted to bring about with this holistic understanding of politics and society.

In contrast to Ambedkar's period, in the 'Republican phase' of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, the pendulum had swung more towards socio-cultural movements. In its 'Bahujan' phase, the movement has swung towards capture of political power through whatever means. It is true that while the earlier one-sided emphasis on socio-cultural movement has been rectified, under the agenda of capturing political power, it has not been possible for it to sustain the momentum on the social plane. It is also worth noting that various other aspects internal to the movement, especially the gender question or developing proper organizational mechanisms have been left unaddressed.

Will it be possible for them to come out of this predicament and retrieve the radical legacy of the Ambedkarian project once again? Will it be possible for the true inheritors of the goal of Dalit emancipation to unleash a storm of political and social movements which would once and for all throw the forces of Hindutva into the dustbin of history?

As things stand today, it is definitely difficult to predict the answer.

Notes

1. Christophe Jaffrelot writes, 'The BSP decided to stand alone, six months later, in the Lok Sabha elections. Yet the party doubled its share of valid votes in Uttar Pradesh from 10 percent in the 1989, 1991 and 1993 elections to 20.6 per cent (9,483,739 votes, fifty more than the Samajwadi Party'. See his *India's Silent Revolution : The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black 2003): 417.
2. Gail Omvedt considers that 'short-term gains from an opportunist alliance with the Bhartiya Janta Party yielded little in the end.' (Gail Omvedt, Dalit Politics, *'The Hindu,* 1 April1998.)
3. The apt description for the same can be had from one of Kanshi Ram's famous quotes: The Congress and the BJP can be compared to white snakes in the green grass whereas communists can be compared to green snakes in green grass.
4. In his 'official' biography of the RSS *Sangh Vriksha ke Beej:* Dr. Keshavrao Hegdewar (Delhi: Suruchi, 1994) C. P. Bhishikar (author) talks about the genesis of the RSS, providing the reasons in his interactions with Mr. Hedgewar.
5. The disdain for Ambedkar was so ingrained in the RSS that none of the stalwarts or its activists bothered to even visit the Deekshabhoomi situated in Nagpur itself untill the early 1980s. It was in early 1980s under the supremoship of Deoras that the RSS had a rethinking on this matter and reviewed its earlier policy in which it decided to coopt him in its list of *prathasmaraniya* (worth remembering in the morning). But the strategy for cooptation was manifold. Ranging from attacking his thoughts *(Riddles in Hinduism)* to projecting him as a 'stooge of the British' to portraying him as 'anti-Muslim' it adopted many tactics from its kitty to present Ambedkar as a Hindu icon who was opposed to Muslims.
6. Oliver Mendelssohn, et al. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 223.
7. Kanshi Ram has written a monograph on the same theme *Chamacha Age: Era of Stooges* (Delhi, privately printed, 1982) wherein he has given details of the compromising nature of the post-Ambedkar Dalit leadership.
8. See oppression by Tyagis (OBCs) on the Chuhras (SCs) in Uttar Pradesh in Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life,* trans by Arun Prabha Mukherjee (Kolkata: Samya, 2003); and oppressions by Thevars (OBCs) against SCs in Tamil Nadu in Thirmaavalavan, *Talisman: Extreme Emo-*

tions of Dalit Liberation, tran by Meena Kandasamy (Kolkata: Samya, 2003).

9. It can also be said that Kanshi Ram is the only politician in mainstream politics who likes to go in for 'frequent elections' and who has publicly declared that he has no qualms in entering 'opportunist alliances' if it strengthens the Bahujan's ascendance to power.
10. For the BSP, the BJP and the Congress were the A team and B team of the Manuwadis respectively.
11. 'My aim is that BSP should move forward. At any given point, I'll enter into a tactical alliance with another party if I feel it will strengthen the BSP. And it is what I have done in the past. I did not enter into an alliance with the BJP because of any ideological common ground—in fact we are poles apart. We entered into an understanding with the BJP last year to increase the base of the BSP and when we feel we are not benefiting any longer, we'll end it . . . I'm only looking for suitable ladder. Cited in the *Times of India*, 21 August 1997, quoted in Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution.*
12. For more details see Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution;* also. Vivek Kumar and Uday Sinha, *Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party: A Perspective from Below* (Lucknow: Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan, 2001).
13. All references in this section are from Mohammad Jameel Akhtar, *Iron Lady: Kumari Mayawati.* (Delhi: Bahujan Sangathak, 1990): p. 88.
14. Sudha Pai and J. Singh, 'Politicisation of Dalits and Most Backward Castes', *EPW* (7 June 1997): 1358, also give details about the way the Bahujan effect was unfolding itself especially vis-à-vis land rights while focusing on the developments in and around Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh.
15. A significant exception to this practice came and relations between the two formations were at a breaking point when Dr. Pravin Togadia of VHP was not allowed to enter Bareilly in the middle of August 2003.
16. It was quite symptomatic that the Student Youth Convention organized under the auspices of AISA-AIYA at Faizabad on 10-11 May 2002 to commemorate the '1857 struggle for India's Independence' underlining communal harmony was not allowed to take place and hundreds of its activists were jailed for weeks together. While there was no reining in of the Togadias, noted Gandhian and Magasaysay award winner Sandeep Pandey is facing charges of sedition for holding a fast for communal harmony in Ayodhya. It is in tune with this new approach that despite early warnings from many quarters the state did not take any decisive steps against the activities of the 'rebel' BJP MP from Gorakhpur, Mr. Aditya Nath, which in turn cost it badly because the city

witnessed communal riots for the first time in post- independence Indian history.

17. It can be said that the process of 'sarvajanization' of the Bahujan formation started only in 1998. During the 1998 and 1999 parliamentary elections the party distributed audiotapes welcoming the savarnas and also promising them due respect. According to *The Pioneer*, 20 Feb 1998, in a public meeting held at Basti, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati clearly said, 'BSP is no more a caste-based party because it had adapted the policy of *Sarvajan Hit* (welfare of all the castes). The party now wanted to take the help of all to remove the disparity prevailing in the society.' Gone were the days when before starting any meeting the 'savarnas', if any, were asked to leave the place immediately and slogans were raised denigrating them *'Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Inko Maro Jute Char'* (One who is familiar with the north Indian lexicon can see that in this slogan itself *Tilak* stands for Brahmins, *Taraju* stands for the Banias and *Talwar* stands for the Thakurs/ Kshatriyas).
18. It can be seen from the BSP's galloping progress in the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections as given in the following table:

Year	Seats contested	No. of seats won	Percentage of votes secured
1989	373	13	9.83
1991	386	12	9.20
1993	166	67	11.20
1996	299	67	20.06
2002	403	98	23.00

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, U.P., Lucknow.

10

Maharashtra: Dalit Politics in the Hindutva Trap

Suhas Palshikar

The radical legacy of Dr. Ambedkar is one of the most precious legacies available for thinking about the reconstruction of Indian society. Therefore, it is no wonder that there are attempts to de-radicalize this legacy, appropriate Ambedkar to legitimize existing power structures and to lure Dalit activists to the more mundane attractions of formal power. The alliance of the Bahujan Samaj Party with the Bharatiya Janata Party is one dimension of this process of 'social engineering' whereby the Dalits are coopted as proponents of political Hindutva. It may intrigue an outside observer that this process is taking place in Maharashtra as well. Notwithstanding a history of Dalit consciousness for almost a century now, Hindutva forces are trying to win away the Dalit masses of Maharashtra and this attempt has not been entirely unsuccessful. Locating these efforts within the context of politics and society of Maharashtra, I argue that while being critical of political Hindutva, one must also reexamine Dalit politics in the state and develop a robust critique of both the ideology and practice of Dalit politics not only in Maharashtra but also elsewhere in India.

Dalit Movement after Independence

The Ambedkar movement evolved in the pre-independence period without cooperating with the mainstream political movements in those years, such as the Congress, communist or socialist. Although it derived some support and sympathy from sections of the non-Brahmin movement[1] Ambedkar preferred to chart a separate course for his

movement since he believed not only in the principle of self-help and self-respect, but also because he was somewhat doubtful about the commitment of the non-Brahmins to the cause of uplift of the ex-untouchables. Strategically, this isolation helped Ambedkar and his movement take independent and at times an 'unpopular' stand on many issues. Ambedkar could thus project the Dalits as a 'minority' deserving political reservations and safeguards. As the political dynamics unfolded, Ambedkar chose to cooperate with the Congress, albeit only briefly. This cooperation was only on the national issue of framing the Constitution and did not involve any political cooperation.

His followers, however, could not stick to this position in the changed scenario in the post-independence period. Their first move was to join the popular movement for the formation of the linguistic state of Maharashtra. Participation in this movement catapulted the Dalit politics of Maharashtra to the centre-stage of state politics. Though the advantage did not last long, it opened up possibilities of cooperation among Dalits and socialists and communists, who were in the forefront of the movement. Then came a painful but unavoidable stage of cooperation with the Congress around the late 1960s. Since then, some faction of the Republican Party of India (RPI) has always been in alliance with the Congress Party, while some other factions have been in the anti-Congress camp. The 'parliamentarism' involved in these moves was resisted by radical activists including those persuaded by Marxist-Leninist ideas. The late 1960s also witnessed the rise of 'non-party' political formations which encouraged and enticed Dalit youth activists to move away from the Congress-led party politics in the state and get involved in people's struggles of a more a radical nature. This churning gave rise to the famous Dalit Panthers movement in the early 1970s. The Panthers had a good equation with the socialist and communist political parties and movements and it seemed as if Dalit politics was finally headed towards a broader based and radical social agenda. However, the Panthers split (the leadership issue) on the issue of interpretation of Ambedkar's thought and strategy. One group believed that Ambedkarism was opposed to Marxism and, therefore, it was wrong to be influenced by Marxist formulations and it was also reprehensible to cooperate with the Marxist parties and groups. However, what the Panthers achieved was perhaps more important. They created awareness about the radical potential of Ambedkar's legacy

and prepared the Dalit activists for a long drawn battle against the forces of Hindu orthodoxy. The early 1970s witnessed pitched battles between the Panthers and the Shiv Sena activists in Mumbai. Thus, for the first time since independence, Dalits were physically assaulted by political opponents. Soon, this rivalry was pushed aside by the tumultuous events of agitations anti-Indira Gandhi in the country, the imposition of the national Emergency in 1975 and new political configurations evolving in the post-Emergency period. Many Dalit groups including most Panther activists directly or indirectly sided with the anti-Congress parties in the post-1977 period. The issue of 'namantar'—naming of the Marathwada University after Dr. Ambedkar—and the stiff opposition it faced from many sections of Marathwada proved another turning point in the relationship of Maharashtra's Dalit groups with various political parties.

This brief narrative cannot be complete without mentioning that since 1958, Dalits in Maharashtra have never had a united political organization. The RPI underwent splits periodically and there have usually been at least three RPI factions at any given point. However, the emotional bond with the label 'RPI' has been so persuasive that all factions call themselves the 'true RPI'. The Panthers tried to make a departure but they too became factionalized. This provided an opportunity to the political establishment to play one faction against the other and dissipate the political energy and radical potential of Dalit politics in Maharashtra. Apart from factionalism, one must also keep in mind the overall Dalit situation in the state. Large-scale migrations have meant that Dalit politics in Maharashtra is mostly centred on cities, especially Mumbai, Nagpur and Aurangabad.[2] Intra-Dalit caste differences are also very pronounced. Mahars, who converted to Buddhism on a large scale, are seen as the more advanced and politically more conscious caste among the Dalits as compared to the other two major Dalit castes of Maharashtra, Charmakar and Matang. Even during Ambedkar's lifetime, there was some discomfort among the non-Mahar sections, and he drew most of his following from the Mahar community. Occasionally, he had to assuage the feelings of non-Mahars by explaining that he was not partial towards the Mahars and he would also have to explain why only Mahars were in the forefront of his conversion move. This unease among the various Dalit communities spilt over to the post-independence period as well. The

RPI has never been successful in attracting the Charmakar and Matang communities and its leadership has also been virtually a single caste leadership. This has further added to the distance between ex-Mahar and the other two Dalit communities. Many ex-Mahar activists are very insistent about conversion to Buddhism as a mark of real radicalism and proof of faith in Ambedkar's ideas. Since the Charmakar and Matang communities have not opted for conversion on a large scale, these communities are derided for their Hindu partisanship by the Buddhist activists. Till the 1990s, RPI activists did not bother to respect the symbols of the Charmakar and Matang communities. The Saint Rohidas Jayanti celebrations would be a Charmakar affair as the commemoration of Annabhau Sathe would be a Matang one. These communities would be less enthusiastic at Ambedkar *Jayanti* celebrations. Moreover, the Buddhists normally keep away from the Ganesh festival and the Shivaji Jayanti celebrations which the Charmakar and Matang people do participate in, which causes them to be suspected of being sympathetic to Hindu ideas and culture.[3] These developments have meant an undercurrent of schism within the Dalit community as a whole, which not only impedes its unified political action but also provides spaces for Hindutva to intervene in Dalit politics.

Electoral Politics

Ever since the RPI was formed, a section of the Dalit community developed emotional bonds with it as a political instrument conceptualized by Ambedkar himself, and the RPI was also seen as the culmination of the political struggle of the Dalits. As the Congress was the dominant political party in the state, Dalit votes traditionally got divided between the RPI and the Congress. As different RPI factions continued to align with the Congress, the latter became the main beneficiary of Dalit votes. Politics in Maharahstra evolved in a framework of Congress domination and except in 1957, when all the non-Congress parties allied against Congress on the issue of formation of the state of Marathi-speaking people, no political party was in a position to challenge the Congress in the electoral arena. As the electoral politics in the state became intensely competitive since the late 1970s, the strategic importance of Dalit votes increased and the competition

for Dalit votes intensified. However, when the Shiv Sena and the BJP arrived on the political scene of the state, they did not benefit from the intensified competition for Dalit votes. These forces were seen as anti-Dalit and anti-Ambedkar. They were also seen as opposed to social transformation, which was supposed to be the hallmark of the Dalit movement then. In the state assembly elections of 1995, when the Congress was defeated by the Shiv Sena and the BJP, 7 percent of Dalit voters voted for the BJP and about 6 percent voted for the Shiv Sena, as opposed to over 31 percent who voted for the Congress.[4] But these elections also witnessed the decline in the effectiveness of the Dalit vote as a result of its fragmentation among different parties and factions. In 1995, for instance, 55 percent of the Dalit votes were divided among RPI factions and parties other than the main players in state politics, that is the Congress or the Shiv Sena and the BJP.

This trend continued throughout the 1990s. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1996, only 28 percent Dalits voted for the Congress and both the Shiv Sena and the BJP received votes from more than 8 percent Dalit voters, again, over 55 percent Dalit votes going to other parties. The elections of 1999 saw a reversal of this trend to some extent as a result of a pre-election alliance between two RPI factions and the Congress and one RPI faction and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). In 1999, the BJP could get only 3.5 percent of Dalit votes while the Shiv Sena retained 7 percent, the Congress garnered 50 percent and NCP another 21 percent.[5] Another interesting aspect of electoral politics is that in spite of a lack of support for the Shiv Sena and the BJP among Dalit voters, these parties have managed to win the majority of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC) in the state assembly. In 1995,the Shiv Sena had five SC MLAs and the BJP had as many as eight SC MLAs against three of the Congress.[6] In the 1999 legislative assembly elections, the BJP had six SC MLAs and the Shiv Sena had five.[7] It must be frustrating for the Dalit activists as well as the ordinary voter to have voted for someone else and being kept out of power through clever electoral arithmetic. The MLAs elected on the BJP and the Shiv Sena tickets are invariably non-Buddhists and particularly from the Charmakar and Matang communities. The BJP had inducted a Matang in the ministry and Shiv Sena had given cabinet berth to a Charmakar when these parties were in power in 1995. This 'social engineering' of the Shiv Sena and the BJP had already created unease

among the Dalit political activists.

With this background, the Shiv Sena leader, Uddhav Thackeray, appealed to the Dalits at a small function in Mumbai in February 2003 to think positively about the alliance between *Shivshakti* (meaning either the Shiv Sena or the caste Hindus) and *Bhimshakti* (meaning the followers of Ambedkar, again implying either all Dalits or Buddhists) (see also Essays 2, 3 and 5). It may be noted that this offensive of the Shiv Sena came close on the heels of the appointment of Sushil Kumar Shinde, a non-Mahar Dalit as chief minister of the Congress-led ministry in the state. The Shiv Sena's strategy has upset the political equations in the state because since the 1999 elections, major RPI factions are in alliance with either the Congress or the NCP. An alliance with the Shiv Sena would mean that the Congress and the NCP could not return to power if the Dalits deserted them. But it also has a larger implication of the realignment of social forces in the state and redefinition of the stand of the Dalits regarding Hinduism, Hindutva and social transformation. Even before the Shiv Sena offered the Dalits an olive branch, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) had attempted in the early 1990s to woo the Dalits by upholding Ambedkar as an icon.

Appropriating Ambedkar

We shall first look at the attempts made by the Hindutva forces to co-opt the Dalits by appropriating the legacy of Ambedkar as being supportive of the Hindu organization. It is well known that under the leadership of Golwalkar Guruji, the RSS often followed an orthodox traditionalist position. Its Hindutva was also non-reformist and based on eulogization of chaturvarna or the fourfold varna division that signified the caste system. In the 1970s, the RSS shifted its stand on the caste system and started saying that it does not believe in caste. It actually made efforts to give itself a reformed outlook. Even then, radicals like Phule and Ambedkar were kept at a distance by the RSS. In the early 1980s, the names of Phule and Ambedkar were included in the daily morning prayer of the RSS (see also Essays 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9).[8] In 1983, the efforts to appropriate Ambedkar began in right earnest. A platform was floated by the RSS in that year, named as the Samajik

Samrasata Manch. The ostensible reason for forming this platform in 1983 was somewhat frivolous: in the year 1983, according to the Hindu calendar, the birth anniversary of Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, fell on 14 April. This coincidence was turned into the exercise of synthesizing Hedgewar and Ambedkar.[9] Since then, some organizations within the RSS family began celebrating 14 April and 6 December in order to associate themselves with Ambedkar and his followers. The activities of the Samrasata Manch remained on a low key during the period 1983-1990. The effort was not in fact to win the Dalits but to convince the non-Dalits of the importance of accepting Ambedkar as one among the pantheons of Hindutva. As one senior activist of the Manch and the RSS put it, the effort was to recontextualize Ambedkar in a manner which would be acceptable to the upper caste Hindus and at the same time to erase the stamp of being anti-Dalit. He candidly stated that the ordinary RSS worker did not see Phule or Ambedkar in a very reverential or affectionate manner. The Samrasata Manch was an effort to change this negative predilection towards the Dalits and Ambedkar.[10]

Much can be said about the semantics involving the term 'Samrasata' that deftly avoids the use of the term 'samata' meaning equality. Samrasata, instead, underscores unity rather than equality. The RSS wanted to consolidate its image by upholding Ambedkar and at the same time did not wish to lay claim to the radical transformative legacy of Ambedkar. This it did through the following manner:

(a) To begin with, the RSS conceded that Ambedkar was a national symbol and an icon of national stature (not just a leader of Dalits). It was stated that Ambedkar was important as a proponent of social unity and thus could not be opposed to national unity (the goal dear to the RSS). (It is another matter that many in the RSS would still have doubts about Ambedkar's nationalist credentials. Arun Shourie's book *Worshipping False Gods* testifies to this tendency.[11])

(b) Secondly, Samrasata Manch sought to project Ambedkar as being favourable to Hindu interests and Hindu unity. While the RSS and the Hindutva forces had been rattled by Ambedkar's decision to adopt Buddhism, now it was argued that the decision

to adopt Buddhism rather than any 'alien' religion was proof that Ambedkar was soft on Hindu society and it was further pointed out that in any case, Buddha is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu! This of course involved considerable falsification and distortion since one of the oaths stipulated by Ambedkar at the time of Dhammadiksha, was to affirm that the person concerned would not accept Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu. But the RSS has not been known either for intellectual capability or for probity and honesty in the field of ideas. Thus distorting Ambedkar to suit their purpose would not be a serious issue for them.

(c) Having once asserted that Ambedkar was interested in the welfare of Hinduism, the Samrasata Manch further sought to depict Ambedkar as religious reformer within Hinduism. Not that the RSS is particularly in love with reformers, but this formulation lays the foundation for the argument that Ambedkar was part of the Hindu religious discourse. In the last century and a half, Hinduism has been discussed in four different discourse frameworks: the reformist, the Christian framework, the modernist-rationalist framework and the transformative framework entrenched in the values of justice and morality. Ambedkar, I would argue, belonged to the last discourse framework and pushing him into the reformist discourse effectively deradicalizes his thought and ideas.

(d) Having pushed Ambedkar into the Hindu reformist framework, the Samrasata Manch further strengthened Ambedkar's place as a Hinduist (pro-Hindutva) thinker by projecting that he was anti-Muslim. (Although Ambedkar's analysis of the Muslim question left much to be desired, his position was still different from that of the RSS and the Hindutva organizations. I have discussed this at some length elsewhere.[12])

(*e*) In order to lend authenticity to its exercise, the Samrasata Manch made efforts to build acceptability to its activity among Dalit intellectuals. This has always created a bitter controversy among Dalit activists and intellectuals. The fact that an orthodox

Hindu organization was out to uphold Ambedkar excited quite a few intellectuals from the Dalit community. The language of Samrasata also attracted many. A veteran Dalit intellectual, Gangadhar Pantawane, was among those who initially endorsed the Samrasata Manch by inaugurating their conference in Pune (4 Dec 1988). His speech was published in a magazine brought out by the Manch. Pantawane anticipated the criticism of his action and argued that even Ambedkar himself used to deliver speeches at the Ganesh festival. Pantawane completely misses the difference between the Ganesh festivals of Ambedkar's time and the political agenda implicit in the activities of the RSS. Such a political position leads him to welcome the RSS' stand refuting Untouchability.[13] Many other Dalit intellectuals similarly failed to appreciate the political import of the activity undertaken by the RSS and naively believed that the language of Samrasata was nothing but liberty, equality and fraternity. For a movement known for the participation of the intellectuals this naivety is somewhat surprising!

The efforts of the Samrasata Manch were aimed firstly at appropriating the legacy of Ambedkar and showing both to the caste Hindus and to the Dalits that Ambedkar was not a revolutionary but a Hindu social reformer. Therefore the Dalits and caste Hindus do not have any reason to bicker over Ambedkar's legacy. Secondly, the message was about Muslims. By trying to project Ambedkar as being opposed to Muslims, the Hindutva forces sought to unite the Dalits and caste Hindus on a common platform of an anti-Muslim offensive. Support to this formulation of Ambedkar came from outside the RSS as well. Two Savarkarite intellectuals came forward in the nineties to interpret Ambedkar as supportive of Hindu interests and as suspicious of Muslims.[14] These writings have become reference points in the Hindutva arguments about Ambedkar. They are interesting not for their intellectual rigour, but at least for revealing the main concerns of contemporary Hindutva. The RSS and the Hindutva organizations have now adopted the ideas of Savarkar regarding Hindutva. It is a militant, anti-Muslim Hindutva, which seeks to derecognize caste inequalities in order to construct a strong Hindutva force. This is a major departure from the brahminical composition of Hindutva. Now the lower castes

are seen as the 'sergeants-at-arms' for a militant political Hindutva.[15]

This neo-Hinduism requires not only the numerical strength of the lower castes and Dalits but also legitimation, and situating Ambedkar among the pantheons of Hindutva serves this purpose admirably. As Gopal Guru described it, this is the strategy aimed at 'Hinduization' of Ambedkar.[16] It is noteworthy that few Dalit intellectuals or groups actually bothered to counter this Hinduist interpretation of Ambedkar. Dalit groups were confident that whatever the Hindutva forces may do, Dalits are and will remain opposed to Hindutva because of Ambedkar's trenchant critique of Hindu religious philosophy. Therefore, no efforts were made to warn Dalit masses against the Hindutva penetration. Secondly, Dalit politics turned Ambedkar into a meaningless icon, thereby neglecting the task of reinterpreting Ambedkar and consolidating his radical legacy. Apart from a few exceptions, Dalit intellectuals did not contest the interpretations of Ambedkar that were being circulated by the RSS or by Hindutva intellectuals like S. H. Deshpande or Sheshrao More. This inability to intervene in the debate about Ambedkar must have contributed to the confusion among the Dalit masses about the issues involved. Also, the same period (1990s) was a period of political turmoil and factionalization of Dalit politics. The Dalit movement had come to a standstill, and the masses were left to look after themselves while the leadership was busy in political negotiations.

The Logic of Power

There is a difference between the efforts to dilute and distort the legacy of Ambedkar and the efforts to bring together the Dalits and caste Hindu supporters of Shiv Sena. The former has a long-term design to appropriate the legacy of Ambedkar while the latter is attempting to drain the Dalit leadership of its following and make it ineffective in the politics of the state. The former aims at wiping out the space occupied by the progressive and anti-caste ideas while the latter seeks to snatch away the political space available to the Dalits in contemporary Maharashtra. At the moment, Dalit politics in Maharashtra is divided among three major factions: the Athavale faction, the Gavai faction and the faction led by Prakash Ambedkar. The Athavale faction has a considerable following in Mumbai and parts of western Maharashtra.

In the Lok Sabha elections, Athavale, supported by the Congress, was elected from a prestigious Mumbai constituency seen as the bastion of the Shiv Sena. Western Maharashtra is the region where the Shiv Sena and the BJP are trying hard to weaken the Congress electorally. Given the fact that Athavale has been consistently arguing for an alliance with the Congress (and NCP) against 'communal' forces, an erosion of the base of his faction would help the Shiv Sena and the BJP. However, the real story is not that Shiv Sena seeks the support of Dalits, but that a large number of activists are in fact sympathetic to the idea of joining hands with the Shiv Sena. One needs to pause and find an explanation of this development. It is being argued not only by activists but also by some intellectuals that the Congress does not give Dalits an adequate share of power and therefore some understanding with the Shiv Sena may be advantageous for the Dalits.

Raosaheb Kasbe, an influential intellectual who has been associated with progressive movements, has in fact come out with an elaborate defence of this trend. Kasbe argues, firstly, that in any case, Sena workers are somewhat removed from the discourse of Hindutva and, therefore, an alliance with it need not be seen as a compromise with Hindutva forces. Secondly, now there is a phase of non-ideological politics, so it dos not matter what your political ally's ideology is. Thirdly, Congress and the NCP are averse to sharing power honestly while the Sena is usually known for keeping its promises. Fourthly, the Congress and the NCP are associated with the Maratha caste while the Shiv Sena is associated with the OBCs. Therefore, an alliance with the Shiv Sena indicates the alliance with the OBCs, which may be socially more progressive. Most important, he argues that the fact of Muslim fundamentalism in places like Mumbai is often ignored by the progressive forces and as such they (progressives) cannot stand up to Muslim communalism. Only the Shiv Sena can fight the communalism of the Muslims and this fact will certainly weigh in the minds of Dalits in allying with the Shiv Sena.[17]

This entire formulation is amazing to say the least. But coming from a senior Dalit intellectual, it assumes significance in terms of the trends within Dalit politics. Kasbe expresses doubt about whether the ordinary Sena activist realizes what is meant by Hindutva but later on clearly accepts that the Sena is anti-Muslim and in fact distinguishes between the straightforward Hindutva of the Sena as opposed to the

sedate and puritanical Hindutva of the RSS (although this assessment too, is seriously flawed).[18] Thus, Kasbe certifies that the Sena is not truly Hinduist and then asserts that it is ir deed Hinduist. This self-contradiction apart, he seems to endorse the 'non-ideological' manner in which politics are allegedly conducted contempc rarily. Again, here too, Kasbe is oblivious to the fact that the politics of the RSS and the BJP are essentially ideological. As far as Kasbe's assertion about the Sena being firm on its word, we shall let it go uncontested since we do not have an experience in this regard nor do we know about Kasbe's source of information. But Kasbe's argument that Shiv Sena represents the OBC force is simply inaccurate. Both in terms of the number of MLAs from different communities and in terms of support from different communities, the Shiv Sena mostly replicates the Congress. It has a large Maratha component supplemented by the OBCs. Secondly, its large base in Mumbai gives the impression that it is a party of the OBCs. But data suggest clearly that it is difficult to describe Sena as the party of the OBCs.[19]

As far as Kasbe's assessment of the Muslim community is concerned, it is merely a restatement of the charges often made by the forces of Hindutva. These charges seek to generalize on the basis of selective examples from the Muslim community and it is unfortunate that Kasbe should fall for this type of propaganda. However, Kasbe's argument is not less important because of these defects. Rather, in spite of these defects, it is important for what it implies and indicates. Firstly, Kasbe is probably arguing that in the game of power, it is important to gain power and considerations of ideology need not come in the way of the pursuit of power. Secondly, Kasbe is also endorsing the prevalent trend of sharing power on the basis of caste or community. On these two counts he is perhaps very much in tune with the ordinary activists. The compulsions of electoral politics and the skilful use of these by the BSP have altered the approach of the activists to the question of power. Dalit youth are enamoured by the aura that surrounds Mayawati and Kanshi Ram. Since they arrived on the scene, the understanding of Ambedkar's writings has also changed. It is now believed that Ambedkar exhorted the Dalits to become 'rulers' and state power was all that Ambedkarism stood for. Even before the RSS appropriated Ambedkar, the BSP had done enough damage to Ambedkar's legacy and prepared Dalit activists for non-ideological and ad hoc alliances

irrespective of the implications for the anti-caste democratic struggles for which Ambedkar strove throughout his life. I have argued elsewhere that the BSP contributed to the trivialization of Ambedkar.[20]

The Implications

In a sense, the contemporary developments need to be seen as a part of the trajectory of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra in the broader context of national politics. After the failure of the Panthers' movement, the Dalit movement in Mahrashtra has declined considerably. This decline is twofold: on the one hand, the democratic transformation visualized by Ambedkar has been lost sight of. On the other hand, workers have not been trained adequately about ideological issues. This has exposed them to a politics of power for the sake of power. The instrumentalist tendency is exacerbated by the compromises made by leadership for *personally* sharing power. While the game of power was unfolding, the ordinary Dalit activists in Maharashtra remained on the margins of power. Leaders would become ministers and MLAs as a result of their 'fight against communalism' while at the local level workers have had to continue to play the role of a powerless opposition. In zilla parishads and other local centres of power, the Dalit activists did not find a place for themselves. This gap has frustrated the ordinary Dalit worker. When such workers look at the Mayawati experiment of Uttar Pradesh, the logic of power defies all other considerations. Instead of taking the long route to power, workers are tempted to turn Ambedkar into an icon rather than a beacon. When the Shiv Sena made the appeal to Dalits to join hands with Shivshakti the logic of power produced an almost collective amnesia among activists and intellectuals like Kasbe alike, about the fact that the same Shiv Sena was in the forefront of opposition to changing the name of Marathwada University after Dr Ambedkar. It was also forgotten that the Shiv Sena has been opposed to reservations on caste basis and that it opposed the decision of the state government to publish Ambedkar's writings critical of Ram and Krishna (*Riddles of Hinduism*). Over the last two decades, the Sena chief Thackeray has stated a number of times that the Sena was opposed to the domination of three *Ms*: Marathas, Muslims and Mahars. This was also forgotten. Nor did any one mention that the Shiv Sena stands for the equation that Hindutva is nationalism. These details suggest

that the alliance of Shivshakti and Bhimshakti is supposed to take place as if in a vacuum and the only point of reference is the logic of power. This may sound absurd but even before the appeal was made; local alliances were struck without much ado. The faction led by Prakash Ambedkar, for instance, entered into an alliance with the Shiv Sena in the Aurangabad corporation. Interestingly, when the Athavale faction was targeted by the Shiv Sena recently, Prakash Ambedkar and his colleagues chose to remain quiet as if the issue did not concern them at all. Such a myopic approach reveals the lack of concern for broader issues.

Dalit politics in Maharashtra is already a weak force politically and ideologically. In fact this reality has encouraged the RSS and now the Shiv Sena to make dents in the ideological and political space so far claimed by progressives. In conclusion, one needs to look at the whole issue beyond mere electoral calculations. If the Shiv Sena succeeds in winning over Dalit youth in parts of the state, it may be able to consolidate its position vis-à-vis the Congress. But more than that, the phenomenon of Dalits aligning with the forces of Hindutva has deeper implications: since the late 1980s we are witnessing an offensive from the Indian establishment. The main aim of this offensive is to sharpen its hegemonic hold over society. This requires decimation of the ideologies of democracy and justice. The appropriation of Ambedkar and the Dalit movement can perform this task for the establishment. Projecting Ambedkar's thought merely as the quest for Dalit power is most convenient to the establishment. Also, sharing power (which has now lost any real control over policy making) with the Dalits does not harm the interests of the establishment anymore. The question before the forces interested in democracy and justice is simple: in times of the march of Fascism, can we afford to lose the ideological beacon called Ambedkar thought and also lose the masses which uphold that beacon?

Notes

1. Following Jotirao Phule's Satyashodhak movement, the non-Brahmin movement arose in Maharashtra against Brahmin domination in general and against caste inequalities. Along with the peasant Maratha community, the lower peasant sections also participated in this

movement. In Maharashtra, this non-Brahmin movement is often distinguished from the Dalit movement. For more details of this, see, Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976).

2. Padma Velaskar, 'The Politics of Untouchability and Social Change: A Study of the Scheduled Castes of Maharashtra', *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy* l, 12, .3 and 4 (2000):473-500; 475-76.
3. Suhas Palshikar, Report for UGC, 'Politics of Marginalized Groups', Dept. of Public Administration and Political Science, University of Pune, 2000: 44-78.
4. Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar, *Maharashtratil Sattantar* (Mumbai: Granthali, 1996): 105.
5. Suhas Palshikar and Rajeshwari Deshpande, 'Maharashtra: Competitive Party System and Structures of Domination, *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy* 15, 1 and 2 (Jan-June 2003): 97-122.
6. Vora and Palshikar, *Maharashtratil Sattantar:* 92.
7. Suhas Palshikar and Nitin Birmal, 'Fragmented Marathas Retain Power', in *India's 1999 Elections and Twentieth-Century Politics*, edited by Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy (Delhi: Sage, 2003): 206-232; p. 225.
8. *Vicharyatra: Dr Hedgewar te Dr Ambedkar: Ek Samajik Pravas* (Pune: Ramabai Auti Vikas Pratishthan, nd): 54.
9. B. P. Sabale, '*Samajik Prabodhanacha Pravas'*, In *Vicharyatra* (RSS publication): 126.
10. Ramesh Patange, *Me, Manu ani Sangh* (Dombivli: Moraya Publications. 1996): 64-65.
11. Arun Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods* (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1997).
12. Suhas Palshikar, *Dr. Ambedkaranchya Hindukaranachi Chikitsa* (Satara: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Academy, 1994).
13. Gangadhar Pantawane, *'Vishwas Watayala Hava,* in *Vicharyatra:*61-64.
14. S. H. Deshpande, *Savarkar Te Bhajap—Hindutvavicharacha Chikitsak Alekh* (Pune: Rajhans, 1992); Sheshrao More, *Savarkaranche Samajkaran: Satya ani Viparyas* (Pune: Rajhans, 1992); and Sheshrao More, *Dr. Ambedkaranche Samajik Dhoran: Ek Abhyas* (Pune: Rajhans, 1998).
15. See Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar, 'Neo-Hinduism: A Case of Distorted Consciousness.' In *State and Society in India,* edited by Jayant Lele and Rajendra Vora (Delhi: Chanakya, 1990): 213-243 for a detailed argument about neo-Hinduism.
16. Gopal Guru, 'Hinduization of Ambedkar in Maharashtra,' *EPW* (16 Feb 1991):339-41.

17. Raosaheb Kasbe, *'Bhimshakti-Shivshakti: Kahi Nirikshane,' Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1-30 April 2003):14-16.
18. Ibid: 16.
19. Suhas Palshikar, 'Shiv Sena: An Assessment,' Dept of Politics, and Public Administration, University of Pune, 1999.
20. Suhas Palshikar, '*Dalit Rajkaranapudhil Pech,' Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1-30 April 2003): 25-29 and Suhas Palshikar, '*Ambedkari Vicharanche Mamulikaran,' Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1-15 Sept 2002): 3, 4, 15.

11

No Exit?
Dalits, Hindutva and the Dravidian Movement

V. Geetha

On 14 April 2001, several Dalit activists, community leaders and anti-caste radicals gathered at the Ambedkar Memorial in Chennai city to recite a pledge which proclaimed: 'We are not Hindus'. The pledge signified two things: a public rejection of Hinduism and a political challenge to Hindutva. Speaker after speaker spoke out against the sinister attempts of the Sangh Parivar to include Dalits within the Hindu fold, and declared that this would never come to pass, since Dalits clearly did not see themselves as Hindus; and besides, they stood to gain very little from being forcibly enfolded into a religion that held them as untouchables.

The pledge was a quite a moving affair—a tribute to the memory of Dr. Ambedkar and his sustained distrust and ultimate rejection of Hinduism. In the following year, a Dalit group, Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai, undertook a march throughout the state to popularize the pledge and explain its significance to Dalit communities and such others as would listen to them. The march received very little public attention; the media, including the vernacular papers and television, more or less ignored it. However Hindutva groups in the state such as the hate-filled Hindu Munnani and religious leaders, including the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi, objected to this defiant campaign. They declared that the march was calculated to belittle Hinduism and an affront to Hindu pride and dignity. The marchers were not provoked, rather, as they remarked later, they felt vindicated in their choice of phrases and slogans, and the meanings they had

invested in these. For after all, the Hindus must feel angered, and be made to come to terms with their own insensitivity to Dalit lives and concerns.

Interestingly enough, the two major Dalit political parties in the state, the Dalit Panthers and Puthiya Tamizhagam, did not appear to be—either at the time of the event or subsequently—entirely comfortable with the 'We are not Hindus' campaign. While they did not reject it outright, they were guarded and rather equivocal in their responses. As far as other political parties in the state were concerned, they could afford to believe that the campaign never happened.

What did the marchers hope to achieve, then? Their concern was not political, in the instrumental sense that the term has come to exist in public discourse. Rather, they wished to begin a process of questioning—of faith, caste status and identity—that would challenge the attractions held out to Dalits of incipient yet systematic Hindutva ideologies and practices. They wished to revive the tradition of challenging orthodoxy which they believed had gone out of fashion.

The march was orderly and civil; police permission was requested for and secured. The marchers confined their street corner meetings and pamphleteering to the main bazaar areas in whatever town or village they visited and then went on to Dalit neighbourhoods. Here, they found the young and the old interested in what they had to say. Young people were enthused by what they perceived as radical daring ideas, while for the older folk the marchers and their ideas revived memories of another time, when a vigorous Dravidian movement championed the cause of atheism and addressed the horrors of Hindu superstition and priestcraft. Those who gathered around the marchers were politically diverse—supporters of different parties—but this did not matter, since they were all equally interested in issues of social and religious identity and power and powerlessness that the 'We are not Hindus' slogan raised for them.

Significantly, the marchers did not seek to impose their slogan on their listeners; for one, they steered clear of everyday Dalit religiosities, the worship of *kula deivams* or local gods and goddesses, which, in any case, was closely linked to existential issues of survival, illness, fear, well-being, healing and sorrow. Rather they chose to explicate on the everyday manifestations of brahminical Hinduism, which disallowed Dalits from entering temples, sanctioned Untouchability and which

filled the upper castes with false pride and fostered a false belief in their superiority. To questions from the audience, 'if Dalits are not Hindus, then what are they?' the organizers explained that Dalits were originally Buddhists. Some wondered what this meant, others felt Buddhism was an attractive option but were curious about its ritual aspects and anxious that it provide them with spiritual rites of passage, festivals and prayer.

Elsewhere, on the main streets, the marchers attracted random interest—people politely took their pamphlets but very few asked questions. Generally, they were quietly ignored—even dominant caste groups and parties did not appear to have much to say, or were clearly indifferent.

It seems to me that the march, a brave though isolated attempt at articulating a different sense of politics, is historically relevant in diverse ways—this is why I chose to begin this essay with a reference to it. It helps me raise a set of questions with respect to that tangle of politics, religion, economics and culture within which Dalit and anti-caste radicals are constrained to function at the current moment.

II

Ideologically and culturally, this past decade has witnessed many a denunciation of Hinduism from Dalits in Tamil Nadu. The reasons are not difficult to understand. For, a significant number of Dalit scholars and leaders have both understood Hindutva for the compact of lies and hate that it is, and for the death-dealing cynicism of its leaders, and also clearly wish to battle its politics. There is also another factor at play here; the growth of Hindutva in Tamil Nadu has taken place in a conjuncture that also witnessed a complete turnabout of Dravidian radicalism. Not too long ago, in fact until the parliamentary elections of 2004, leaders of the Dravidian movement found it worthwhile to consort with Hindutva in one way or another – and for many this appeared as much an indication of the movement's self-betrayal as it was of the power and attractions of Hindutva ideologies. While there is, as yet, no clear consensus on how this happened, very few Dalits dispute the fact that the Dravidian movement has reneged on its own glorious past (there are some who question whether the past was not tainted as well).

The persistence of violence against Dalits and the hatred that the latter have had to confront this past decade in parts of Tamil Nadu are the reasons why Dalits today point to Dravidian self-betrayal. Some read this self-betrayal in terms of the Dravidian movement having enabled the upward mobility of backward castes, while simultaneously disenabling the claims of Dalits. Others see in it unease rather than triumph, fear of Dalit militancy, which takes refuge in hidebound practices of oppression and humiliation, rather than an assertion of resurgence in caste pride. Yet others view the Dravidian movement's failure to be a consequence of electoral politics—given the facts of caste demography and the need to build support blocs which would win votes, no party, even one with radical pretensions, could afford to alienate regionally dominant castes. Ideological pressures have thus come to be necessarily subordinated to political imperatives, and, as a consequence, radicalism remains writ large in slogans and rhetoric, while in actual practice, very little, beyond the populist and the electorally permissible, is achieved.

This question awaits serious interrogation, but for now, it would appear important to map the field thus: almost four decades of Dravidian rule in the state has resulted in marginal benefits for almost all castes—including the Dalits. The relative success of the reservation policy in the state, the expansion of technical education which gave several thousands of lower caste students an access to higher education and enabled the evolution of a widely available public health service whose beneficiaries were the poor, have resulted in a measure of progress for all concerned. It is, however, important to note here that consistently Dalits have benefited less than other communities, and there remains a substantial gap between even the most backward castes (MBCs) and Dalits, in matters of health, education, wages, presence in government jobs and positions.[1]

Most important, progress has not come easy to Dalits. Caste Hindu society has been grudging of Dalit progress and, worse, done its best to impede it. This is evident from the personal histories of Dalits, all of which narrate, with a greater or lesser degree of wry anguish, the inevitable 'testing' of Dalit identity, the subtle scorn that Dalit students or young officials in government endure as they fight to push the limits of their bounded existence.[2] Thus Dalit attempts to affirm and secure their rights have exacted from them enormous fortitude, tact and courage

—and this has been the case in both political and civil society

Dalit anguish in these and other related instances is poignant since, all along, Dalits have been supporters of Dravidian radicalism, from its earliest 'self-respect campaign' days and had always sought to 'own' the movement as their own. It is not surprising then that Dalits today are bitter towards their own radical past, and some of them are busy disowning it. They are especially unhappy that regionally dominant caste groups, which today exude caste pride and self-confidence, and are the chief social and political beneficiaries of several decades of Dravidian rule, appear unrepentant in their caste pride. Angered by Dalit militancy and beset by an entirely misplaced sense of having an insufficient share of social welfare benefits, and convinced that the Dalits have more than their share, these groups have sought to punish the Dalits for their attempts to better their lives.[3]

For Dalit thinkers and ideologues, the viciousness with which Untouchability continues to be re-affirmed on a daily basis is emblematic of a historic national—and local—failure to successfully eradicate the practice out of existence. Feeling bereft and burdened at the same time, it is not surprising that some of them—for instance, the ideologues of the Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai— have returned to older, 'self-respect' themes of systematic humiliation and religious oppression, that is, to opposing Hinduism, as such. These themes which held civic attention even until the 1970s—the last decade of E.V. Ramasamy Periyar's life—had since come to be subsumed within the terms of a new political category: the atrocity. All crimes against dalits are now viewed as 'atrocities', which casts them into the category of the exceptional. But the point is, as dalit intellectuals argue, crimes against dalits are really 'normal' outcomes of everyday Untouchability and the challenge therefore is to find out how injustice and humiliation are 'normalized'. That is, we need to ask: what makes it possible for the caste Hindus to practise inhumanity so often and so easily?

The fact that this question is seldom posed points to a failure of not only the Dravidian movement, but our collective social imagination and signifies a dismal shrinking of our public conscience. Dalit thinkers who wish to raise such issues clearly wish to stretch and ultimately break the constraints of a cruelly inert and ideologically sterile political and public culture. Significantly, Dalit political parties in Tamil Nadu too have been trapped within the politics of the atrocity. From the late

1980s and well into the mid-1990s, Thirumaavalavan of the Dalit Panthers and Dr. Krishnaswamy of the Puthiya Tamizhagam have mobilized thousands of Dalits around a variety of issues: for reprisals against caste Hindu violence, campaigns against a violent and biased police force, better wages in plantations for Dalit workers, against blatant discrimination in public places such as the 'two glasses' system still prevalent in certain villages. Often, though, these struggles have remained captive to a discourse of 'rights', both in the formal and legal sense of the term, as well as in terms of conceptualizing the nature of Dalit oppression. Also, much of the propaganda and persuasion used to mobilize Dalits are constrained to remain largely local in character, given the fact that they have to address local tyrannies for the most part. Thus it has not been possible for Dalit groups and parties, except when they declaim against Hindutva, to systematically indict Hindu society and the faith and customs which animate it. In the opinion of some Dalit intellectuals, this, combined with the failure of Dravidian radicalism, has contributed to a state of mental and political anomie in Dalit political and social life.[4]

What would an indictment of Hindu faith, customs and society achieve in pragmatic terms? Dalit intellectuals argue that it would render visible a critical perspective on faith, an option that is almost non-existent for most people, and besides, in the current context, demonstrate to Dalits the extremely dubious politics of Hindutva, in particular, the nature of its interest in the Dalit cause.

III

The indictment of Hinduism that some Dalit intellectuals propose assumes that Dalits have a stake in rejecting the religion that they are born into. But is such an assumption tenable at all?

Dalit Hindu sacrality is not singular—though distinctive, it partakes of a religious commons, which is available to all lower caste groups. But a Dalit is not Hindu in quite the same way as a lower caste non-Dalit Hindu is: apart from specific rites and rituals, Untouchability separates them from others, and thus their sense of being 'Hindu' is almost always incomplete. They cannot expect to do certain things, such as garner privileges in village temple festivals, or insist on their equal rights to pulling the temple chariot. And even if they do succeed

in affirming these claims, they realize, sooner or later, that their hard won rights are neither transferable nor universal. For instance, they might succeed in asserting their right to contribute to the village temple festival, but they cannot therefore expect to be allowed the right to offer worship before the upper castes have said their prayers. Yet, very few Dalits would consider themselves as anything but Hindu. This is where we encounter a paradox that lies at the core of the caste system. What is denied also becomes the measure of what is most valuable. But a Dalit can never hope to realize that value, since, given his or her location, it is always placed out of reach, always deferred.

The paradoxical position of Dalits within and outside Hinduism could either lead to a wholesale rejection of the Hindu order, or an affirmation of it, in the belief that this would enable Dalits to claim their due in matters of both faith and social status. While Dalit intellectuals and activists are drawn to the first option, Hindutva ideologues have found the second useful and productive. They have attempted to persuade Dalits to view themselves as full-fledged Hindus and assured them that Untouchablility is an aberration that will not be observed in a Hindu rashtra.

This persuasion works in complex ways. In Tamil Nadu, since the late 1980s, Hindu political groups aligned to the Sangh Parivar in one way or another have attempted to, and partially succeeded in, recruiting Dalit youth to their ranks. This has been the case with groups in Chennai that have looked to swelling their ranks during the annual Ganesh Chathurti processions with a posse of young Dalits from the city's various slums. The promise of liquor, money and a 'good time', a chance to be in the public eye and to take advantage of the prevailing carnival mood have proved immensely attractive to young men. It is difficult to ascertain, though, whether these youth remained with the Hindu groups thereafter.

Chris Fuller's research into the Ganesh Chathurti processions in Tamil Nadu notes that Hindu groups linked to the Sangh Parivar have to contend with local big men, party notables (DMK and AIADMK men have been part of local festival committees) and other heavyweights, who, anyway, are involved in these processions. In some instances, the latter would cooperate with the Hindu group in question, while in other instances they would prefer to do things on their own. Caste could be a deciding factor in such cases, notes Fuller, especially

in smaller towns, where caste Hindu identities are proudly affirmed. And this of course means that Dalit presence, whether as storm troopers or co-participants, is not welcome.[5]

An approach that does not successfully address or at least appear to address Untouchability will of course not work, and Hindutva ideologues have been conscious of this. Since the last decade, they have sent out service brigades to work in Dalit colonies—operating under the aegis of the Kanchi Shankaracharya's Jan Kalyan programme—which engage in a range of activities, including the arranging of free marriages, feeding the poor, free medical camps, and so on. Interestingly, the Sangh Parivar did not have to bring in its own institutional support systems to accomplish this endeavour. It could instead, count on the existing networks of Hindu faith and charity. More recently, Sangh Parivar enthusiasts have taken to visiting Dalit colonies in villages—with offers to repair temples or to build new ones; by supporting a local Dalit leader in matters of business or education; and by organizing self-help groups or savings groups for women. Dalit activists in southern Tamil Nadu point out that the sudden spurt of temple renovation and building in parts of the state has been entirely due to the efforts of these Hindutva groups. They also point out that in some villages, where traditional animistic practices and animal sacrifices have almost all but disappeared, Dalits proudly affirm themselves to be 'clean' and 'progressive' Hindus.

As if to underscore the Sangh Parivar's determination to abolish or at least overlook Untouchability, Hindu leaders, most notably the Kanchi Shankaracharya, have publicly announced that Dalits are part of the great Hindu family and cannot be considered aliens or outcasts. The Shankaracharya has even condescended to visit memorials of Dalit leaders, though, as one Dalit journalist wryly noted, he made sure that his saffron robes did not so much as brush against the modest grave of the late Kakkan, a Congressman who worked closely with the much-loved chief minister of Tamil Nadu, K. Kamaraj. The point is that such gestures have had their desired effect. Some Dalit leaders have taken the Shankaracharya at his word and affirmed their Hindu status.

Here again, as with the Dalit youth who participate in Ganesh Chathurthi processions, it is not easy to identify the reasons as to why a Dalit leader would want to consort with the orthodox arch-Hindu leader. But, whether drawn by promises of power or the aura of spiritual

authority, or for more material considerations, some Dalit leaders have had no qualms about displaying their Hindu status in public.

It must be remembered here that in the late 1990s, some Dalit groups understood the attempts of Hindutva ideologues to woo them as part of their grand strategy to create a Hindu vanguard against Muslims and Christians. Thus the Puthiya Tamizhagam, along with the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (a Muslim group committed to a vision of Islam that includes a radical understanding of social justice) held a Dalit-Muslim unity conference in Ramanathapuram. The doyens of Hindutva got the message. In the reprisals that followed Muslim shops were targeted, in addition to the usual burning of Dalit homes. However this unity is yet to be consolidated, though there have been other instances of Dalits and Muslims working together, especially in criticizing and responding to Hindutva. Secular-minded groups and intellectuals have endorsed such efforts, but as a Dalit activist put it, the point is not to rail against Hindutva from a common forum, but to carry forward criticisms of Hinduism and caste into forums which otherwise would not wish to discuss them. Secular intellectuals ought to therefore address the question of Untouchability in their own contexts, whether these are political parties or informal organizations and, likewise, Muslims ought to be able to discuss casteism amongst the faithful.

IV

Radical Dalit youth read the failure of Dalit leaders to rise to the historic moment, defined by Hindutva, as an instance of their timorous equivocation with regard to Hinduism. They point out that the older generation of Dalit leaders—Y. Balasundaram of the Republican Party of India and Ilayaperumal of the Human Rights Party—did not hesitate to affirm their Hindu status. Though contemporary Dalit leaders would desist from doing so, they are still unwilling to concede that it is Hinduism that is the problem. Perhaps they do not wish to alienate themselves from the broad masses of the people, or perhaps they are mindful of the fluid nature of political alliances and misalliances and wish, therefore, to keep all options open. Or it may even be that they understand only too well the insidious designs that Hindutva has on

Dalit politics and prefer to play along, hoping to notch up strategic gains for themselves in electoral terms.

To these young activists that Hindutva has defined political debate and options on its terms in itself is an index of success. This leaves other parties only an illusion of political choice. Again, to them and all else who follow Tamil Nadu politics, it is clear that the narrowing down of political possibilities is not only an effect of Hindutva—it also signifies the collapse of the Dravidian political imagination. Self-respect, anti-caste campaigns, secular atheism, anti-Brahmin critique, gender justice have all, for various reasons, dropped out of political discourse and public memory, or exist merely as rhetoric. Tamil nationalism has survived, but it is a ghostly presence whose energies are clearly spent—even in those instances where it lives an active political life, as in those nationalist groups which support the LTTE—it seems out of step with the politics of the present moment. Yet, its emotive power is strong and the responses it evokes are eloquent.

However, contemporary expressions of Tamil nationalism—dissociated from radical social thought and practice—hold no attractions for Dalits. For one, as M. S. S. Pandian has pointed out in a recent article, 'Tamilness' has become a trope in Hindutva discourses as well[6]. Besides, there is no inherent necessity for a Tamil nationalist who opposes the hegemonic claims of brahminical Hinduism and Sanskrit to be sensitive to the politics of Untouchability. Tamil Saivites, many of whom are 'clean' caste non-Brahmins, were beside themselves with rage when the Kanchi Shankaracharya proclaimed that Sanskrit alone could serve the purpose of worship and prayer. But in another instance, with respect to the anti-conversion bill, many amongst the Saivites were eager to endorse the Shankaracharya's support of it.

There is a long and tortuous history to the waning of radical thought in the state, the writing of which, as I mentioned earlier, is yet to be undertaken. I will attempt a short summary here, recapitulating arguments I have made earlier and adding others to these.

We have proof of Dravidian radicalism fading away in the manner in which Dravidian leaders, as distinct as K. Veeramani of the Dravidar Kazhagam and M. Karunanidhi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam define their respective political positions. The former, until recently, was a faithful supporter of the anti-democratic and resolutely pro-Hindu government of J. Jayalalithaa, while the latter until the 2004

elections decided to overlook and deliberately downplay Hindutva and chose to form political alliances with it. While both these leaders have since re-defined their politics their sustained equivocation with respect to the politics of the Hindu Right has fudged their credibility.

As for J. Jayalalithaa herself, there is a measure of historical vengefulness in the systematic manner in which she has set about destroying the political confidence enjoyed by those social constituencies that have traditionally nursed and upheld the ideologies of the Dravidian movement—the urban poor, government employees, students, minority communities. Besides this she has deliberately cultivated and groomed those sections of the populace which had, all along, found Dravidian politics anathema. The latter would include the rural poor, especially in the southern reaches of the state (many of whom are Dalits), who were ardent supporters of the late M. G. Ramachandran, resurgent caste Hindu groups, such as the Thevars, and now a section of the powerful Nadar community, who are deeply 'Hindu' and therefore willing to go along with a party that enjoys the Sangh Parivar's confidence, though traditionally, many of them were either with the Congress or the Dravidian movement.

The death of Dravidian politics is perhaps exemplified best by the changes in the nature of the state in Tamil Nadu. In the discourses in Dravidian thinking, the state was considered the guarantor of the commonwealth. Through legislation and governance, the state was meant to enforce social justice, ensure economic equality and usher in a rational, modern worldview. In common public perception though the state came to be viewed as a resource basket to which everyone, notionally at least, had access. When the state could not redeem its promises of plenty, this led to disaffection, as happened with the Vanniyar agitations of the 1970s. But the state did not appear illegitimate on that account.

In the present context though, through deliberate acts of dismantling and re-engineering, the state has managed to renege on its promises, especially to the Dalits, whereby the legitimacy it is claiming for itself is dubious, to say the least. One has only to consider the following to comprehend the gravity of the situation: reserved posts in government jobs are not being filled, educational support to Adi-Dravida (Dalit) schools in the form of special institutional support grants is being limited, the Dalits' right to a religion of their choice had been threatened by the

anti-conversion legislation (this has been repealed following the AIADMK's electoral rout in the 2004 parliamentary election. But the cavalier manner in which the matter has been handled exemplifies the state's constitutive arrogance), the ordinance on handing over waste land or the village commons for private enterprise has affected the livelihood of Dalits. On the other hand, the powers of the state, especially of the police, are extensive and are growing. It is no surprise that in such a context some Dalit intellectuals are suspicious of a politics that relies on a 'rights' approach alone, for what justice can one expect from a state that is increasingly becoming distant and unaccountable to its citizens?

V

What does all this add up to? Firstly, in a context where Dalits perceive anti-caste radicalism, once characteristic of political debate and practice in the state, to be more or less dead, their political and social status has become even more vulnerable. On the other hand, given the nature of political demography in the state, Dalits cannot hope to unite into a single party and resist all other social and political formations. Secondly, there does exist a gap between the self-conscious rejection of Hinduism by radical Dalit thought, and its affirmation by masses of Dalits, either because it is given to them, or because they are not Christians or Muslims, and because they do hold that securing a position within the Hindu order would vindicate their struggles for dignity and acceptance. Thirdly, with the collapse of anti-caste radicalism, the Dravidian movement has lost its imaginative prowess and necessarily has to court other ideologies and align itself to a politics of the possible. This has led the Dravidian parties to do a complete political turnabout and more important, granted Hindutva a legitimacy that it did not possess earlier.

Fourthly, with the retreat of the state from its position as the guarantor of the commonwealth and its deliberate arming of itself with powers that render it almost non-accountable, Dalits and other oppressed castes have been left without a means for justice or redressal. This means that they are literally at the mercy of economic and social power groups and networks that possess a greater measure of leverage and bargaining power. In this context, the only consolation the state

offers is in the ideological sphere, for example, by defining the common good in cultural and religious terms, which, of course, helps to create and sustain the myth of 'an enemy' and forces the oppressed communities into belligerence, at the behest of the state or those interests which enjoy its protection. (We witnessed this in Gujarat and it is possible that in Tamil Nadu, an increasingly non-accountable state, rather than, or perhaps along with, ideological mobilization will secure victories for political Fascism.)

Yet, we must register and acknowledge here that there is dissent, opposition and anger amongst Dalit thinkers and intellectuals and local Dalit leaders. These defiant emotions, though, are hungry for a context and a movement that would enable them to carry forth their ideological convictions into a struggle that would once again catapult Dalits into the centre-stage of politics for social justice.

Notes

I wish to thank S. Natarajan of the Rettamali Srinivasan Peravai, Yakkan, and Punitha Pandian of Dalit Murasu for their observations and comments on Dalits and Hindutva and Dalit intellectual and political choices. This article owes its founding premises to their arguments.

1. P. Radhakrishnan, 'Sensitising Officials on Dalits and Reservation', *EPW* (16 Feb 2002) demonstrates the consistently low level of access available to Dalits who wish to avail of affirmative action benefits. However, it is also the case that not all lower castes have benefited equally or evenly from positive discrimination. The emergence of competing backward caste blocs since the 1970s and the conflicting claims they put forth in the fields of education and service, point to a great deal of unevenness in terms of benefits reaching those at the bottom of the social heap. It is also important to note that whatever progress has been achieved has been systematically gendered—women in almost every caste continue to experience problems in asserting their claims to equal opportunities—be it in the fields of education, employment or welfare services.
2. Several Tamil Dalit autobiographies record such instances of being 'marked'. For instance, there are instances of such a marking and rejection in Bama's *Karukku* (English translation, Chennai: Macmillan, 2000).
3. P. Radhakrishnan in his examination of the demands put forth by the

Vanniyars, a backward caste low in the economic and social hierarchy, has observed how their claims are inexorably partisan, though they attempt to dress them up as broad and inclusive. He has also noted that they construct their demands in a manner that tacitly queries Dalit claims. Caste pride and jealousy have combined to mobilize the militant backward caste of Thevars to resist all Dalit attempts at social and economic progress, leading to a spate of punishing riots in the 1990s. See 'Vanniyar Separatism: Nebulous Issues', *EPW* (10 August 2002).

4. Even those efforts that were undertaken as a gesture towards a larger more inclusive politics are regarded with suspicion by a section of Dalit youth. Thirumaavalavan of the Dalit Panthers announced—in defiance of the anti-conversion law—that he and his followers would, in protest, change their Hindu names in public and call themselves by 'purely Tamil' names, that is, names which bore no marks of caste or creed, but which were linguistically and semantically secular. Non-Dalits too were invited to change their names, if they so wished. This did seem a significant gesture to many, since invocations of a common Tamil identity had, in the past, served to bring people from diverse social and cultural locations together to combat caste Hindu pride and brahminical hegemony. But some others accused Thirumaavalavan of skirting the issue: what was needed was not a change of names, but an assertion of one's right to convert. They argued he ought to have called for a grand conversion rally—ask for Dalits to convert en masse, for instance.
5. Fuller refers to one such instance in Ramanathanpuram district where a Dalit was disallowed from offering the first puja during the Ganesh Chathurthi festival (Chris Fuller, 'The Vinayaka Chaturthi Festival and Hindutva in Tamil Nadu', *EPW* (12 May 2001).
6. M. S. S. Pandian, 'Tamil-Friendly Hindutva', *EPW* (27 May 2000).

12

Contesting Exclusions: Dalits and Reconstructions of Religious Identities in Punjab

Navprit Kaur

Introduction

On 5 June 2003, a small village named Talhan in the Jalandhar district of Punjab witnessed a violent clash between the members of Jat and Dalit communities. The violence immediately spread to the adjoining areas of Jalandhar, leading to the death of a Dalit youth in a police firing. Rather than treating it as one of the routine incidents of caste violence, we must view Talhan as a context to understand the complex dynamics of caste relations in the particular setting of Punjab. Never has caste violence of this kind been witnessed in the recent history of Punjab. The importance of the incident might be gauged from the fact that it forced the ruling Congress led by Captain Amrinder Singh to launch 'Operation Healing Touch'[1] in the violence ravaged areas of Jalandhar city, while the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee had constituted a five-member committee to probe the incident.[2]

After the Gujarat carnage of 2002, the role and position of Dalits as a counter force to the oppressive nature of brahminical powers has come to be questioned. Now that there are attempts to formulate the *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* alliance even in Maharashtra, which otherwise is considered to be the centre of Ambedkarism, the powerful assertion by the Dalits in Punjab for representation in the management of Sikh religious shrines, the Gurdwaras, points towards a positive trend. This assertion might be understood as a part of the historical process in Punjab where religion has always been a powerful means for the lower

caste assertions in the socio-cultural and political milieu of the state. In a political milieu, highly influenced by the religious affiliations of key players, the Dalits in Punjab have historically sought to articulate their religious identity in order to undermine caste-based dominations and oppressions.

Including the Excluded: Dalits and the Politics of Inclusion

Punjab is one of the few states of India with a non-Hindu majority. The nature of religion and caste in Punjabi society has been markedly different when compared with the rest of the country. Furthermore, religious as well as caste structures have continuously changed through mediations by social, political, and economic forces in the region. As it is well known by now, in order to implement their fascist designs and to broaden their social base, the Hindutva forces have targeted the minority communities. In the recent past they have rather successfully invented and stigmatized the Muslims and Christians as the Other. But the demographic nature of Punjabi society itself provides a very slippery ground to the Hindutva forces to target the Sikhs. The eruption of strong nationality aspirations of the Punjabis in the form of the Khalistan movement in the 1980s and 1990s made it clear that Punjab provided a very weak ground for Hindutva's designs. The presence of militantly rightist forces within the Sikhs has proved to counter-balance the Hindutva elements in the state. In this scenario, the lower caste conversions to Christianity have provided them with an Other, which could be manipulated in order to define the Hindu 'self'. Interestingly enough, taking advantage of the presence of the rightist elements within the Sikhs, the Hindutva forces have tried to forge a common ground with them on the issue of the growing number of lower caste conversions to Christianity in Punjab. In a recent article 'The attack of Christianity on the Land of the Gurus', published in the RSS monthly from Punjab, a strong concern has been expressed over the lower caste conversions to Christianity.[3] The RSS also published a report of the six-member fact-finding committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on the Christian conversions in the border areas of Punjab. K. C. Sudarshan, the national head of the RSS, in another article in the

same issue, states that if the identity of the Sikhs is subsumed through the church, the Hindus would always be together with their Sikh brethren.[4]

Sudarshan's statement appears to suggest quite clearly that the lower caste conversions to an 'alien' faith are of such immense importance to the Hindutva forces that they will not mind joining hands with the Sikhs on this particular issue. By projecting Christianity as dangerous to the identity of the Sikhs as well as the Hindus, the invention of the Other is complete. One must note that this is not a simple process of 'othering' the Christians. It is the physical body of the Dalit which is seen as doubly polluted; as a Dalit and as a Christian. Thus the call to both the Hindus and the Sikhs to purify and restore the Dalit body to its previous position! In the process the Dalit is projected as a silent and passive object. I will elaborate later the Dalit assertions and protests at various times and spaces which provide a counter-history to the upper caste perceptions and treatment of the Dalits. One needs to underline the fact that the objectification of the Dalits is not new, nor are the attempts by the Hindutva forces to forge alliances with the dominant communities and castes within the Sikhs in order to address the 'question of the lower castes'.

The situation is reminiscent of caste, class and religious formulations and their politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Punjab. Lower caste conversions to Christianity took place on a large scale. It led to a fierce competition among the Hindu and Sikh leaderships and reformers to take the lower castes into their respective folds. Though historically there had been attempts to include the Dalits in the socio-political and cultural domains by the upper castes, it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, due to heightened communal activity in Punjab, that those in dominant caste positions began to take the lower castes seriously. After the decline of Sikh rule and with the advent of the British, the Raj and the church advanced side by side in the mid-nineteenth century in Punjab.[5] Armed with the might of the state, the British colonizers adopted a two-pronged strategy to propagate the gospel. The first was to publish evangelical literature in the vernacular and the second was the opening up of mission schools in Punjab.[6] These attempts bore fruit as the 1891 census reported an increase of 401 percent in the Christian population, as compared to the 1881 census report.[7]

Who were these converts to Christianity in terms of their caste identities and social status? These large scale conversions in the late nineteenth century were certainly not from the upper echelons of the society. Though originally the missionaries in Punjab were only interested in converting the upper castes,[8] in 1873 the conversion of a Chuhra, named Ditt, led to thousands of others from the same caste following suit.[9] Such a large-scale conversion baffled as well as embarrassed the missionaries. The missionaries in their reports from the field tried to undermine the caste identity of these converts by describing the Punjabi Christians as 'common villagers' or 'illiterate menials'. It was the lower castes who were more enthusiastic about these conversions than the missionaries themselves.[10]

One might inquire into the reasons that led the Chuhras to convert on such a large scale. The answers are not hard to find. The Chuhras had their own belief systems and religious practices centred on the figures of Balmiki, Lal Beg or Bala Shah, but they also tended to adopt dominant religious rituals—Hindu, Sikh or Muslim—whichever was prevalent in their village.[11] Nevertheless Hinduism with its ideologies of purity and pollution could not be relied upon by the lower castes as far as caste discrimination and hierarchies were concerned. Similar was the case with Islam where society became hierarchical and divided into low and high on the basis of caste. The untouchables who converted to Sikhism suffered disabilities of caste in the later period of the Sikh empire,[12] for caste hierarchies existed among the Sikhs as well. Rural untouchables generally referred to as the Chuhras, the Mazhabis or the Rangretas, were placed at the bottom of this hierarchy.[13]

These conversions of the lowest of the low were indeed a powerful and, at the same time, risky act of rebellion in the communally charged atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not the material gains primarily which led the Chuhras to adopt Christianity, rather it was the transforming power of religious acceptance which impelled the lower caste people to shift to a religion looked at with suspicion by many in their own villages and cities. Christianity provided them with a new identity that made them change their names, eating habits and provided numerous other opportunities for self-betterment. The new religious identity in fact provided a cushion for the helpless Dalits in the highly oppressive caste structure of the village. In their struggle for survival, status and gain within the village,

the Dalits could now rely safely on the presence and influence of the Christian missionaries.[14] But their new identities did not displace their old customs and traditions entirely. The Dalits still followed their own traditions which historically formed part of their daily lives.

Simultaneously, there was another development taking place. After it had been established in Bombay in 1875, the first branch of the Arya Samaj came into existence in Punjab in 1877. Due to historical reasons, Hindus were already a minority community in Punjab. The large-scale conversions to Christianity from among the lower castes sent warning signals to the religious leadership within both the Hindus and the Sikhs. The caste Hindus were in search of an ideology which could legitimize the traditional Hindu social system and at the same time retain in its fold the potential converts to other religions. To fulfil this need, the Arya Samaj adopted a strategy called *shuddhi*.[15] It was presumed that Untouchability emanated from ritual impurity and therefore, a ritual for its removal could render the untouchables touchables. Thus it devised a new ritual whereby the lower castes got a chance to raise their status without going outside the fold of Hinduism. It was Lala Lajpat Rai, a national leader and a staunch Arya Samajist, who gave expression to the strong need to reformulate Hindu social order according to the demands of the nationalist movement itself.[16] The upper caste leadership within Hindus and Sikhs had to address the issues of the lower castes as it redefined and rearticulated its own identities. It should not be concluded that it was the social reformers alone, and not the Dalits, who were interested in these conversions. Indeed, the Dalits too were interested in seeking new avenues which promised an elevation from their traditionally lower caste status. We may argue that by treating the lower caste people in a paternalistic manner and by considering them as subjects in need of some kind of uplift as far as their social status was concerned, the upper caste leadership in a way recognized the fact that the social hierarchies based on caste were a fact of life for millions of lower castes.

The leaders of the Arya Samaj in 1886 turned their attention to the Mazhabi Sikhs, who despite being converted to Sikhism were considered to be lower in status to the Muslims.[17] It was the educated and economically ascendant Mazhabis who pressurized the Samaj leadership to take up their cause. It clearly indicates that the Dalits were open to various measures that could help rid them of their low

position in society. Similarly, the Rahitas from Jalandhar Doab areas of Punjab, weavers by tradition, appealed to their own community, the prominent Sikhs, to improve their traditional caste status, and decided to follow another path when their appeals were not taken serious note of.[18] But joining the Arya Samaj did not solve the problems of the low caste Sikhs. It sent alarm signals to the Sikh leadership which was already entangled in a battle for a distinct Sikh identity vis-à-vis the militantly religious Arya Samaj. Its reactions with regard to the Rahita Sikhs' conversions to the Arya Samaj were carried in the newspaper *Khalsa,*

> We may however mention that the *Rahita* Sikhs will be losers if they take shelter with the Arya Samaj. As soon as it is known that they have parted with the symbols of Sikhism, it will be difficult for them to live peacefully in the villages inhabited by the Sikhs. There is nothing which a Sikh hates more than an apostate from his faith, and knowing this as we do, we cannot congratulate our *Rahita* brethren on their expected admission into Arya Samaj.[19]

Even the last minute attempts by the Sikh leadership to dissuade the Dalits from converting to Hinduism proved futile. The leader of the lower caste would-be converts, Nagina Singh, told the Sikh reformers that if they ensured them that the Sikhs would inter-marry and inter-dine with them they would not even dream of going out of the Sikh faith.[20] The importance of this act of the Rahitas lies not in their conversion to Arya Samaj, but in the boldness of denouncing their earlier identity as Sikhs. These converts, in fact, brought the social reality to the foreground as far as Sikhism was concerned. Their attempt to elevate their social status was met with tough resistance as had been predicted in the *Khalsa*. Even so, more Rahitas came forward for shuddhi from Lahore, Ropar and places as far west as Lyallpur.[21] Thus Dalits were included in the mainstream, not in order to change the basic structures in caste-ridden Punjabi society but because of the importance placed on the numerical strength of a community. These conversions and re-conversions should be understood as part of a broader process of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century politics of Punjab.

At this time, social reformers from both Hindu and Sikh communities sought to redefine and rearticulate their respective religious identities, that is, what it meant to be a Hindu or a Sikh, according to the political needs of their own communities. It was the transformation of religious identities, from being fluid and ambiguous into sharp and clearly defined religious boundaries, which in turn led to competition among the upper castes from various communities to reclaim the Dalits as their own. As for the Dalits, those who converted could not be considered independent agents fighting for their emancipation in any modern sense of the term. Through conversions, Dalits tried to create their own space with limited avenues that were available to them at the time. Thus, they, rather than rejecting caste or their old religion per se, sought to rearticulate their position within the existing structures. While the upper castes reclaimed Dalits in order to consolidate their numerical strength and political clout vis-à-vis the 'other' religion, the Dalits explored new vistas to give voice to their own discontents as far as the existing social reality of caste was concerned.

Thus it can be seen that the Dalits, by rearticulating the religion in order to elevate their socio-political status, in a way used what was a double edged weapon for creating a democratic space for themselves. During the early twentieth century, Punjab witnessed a powerful assertion of the Dalits in the form of a new movement. This assertion of the Dalits was again couched in religious vocabulary. The Dalits, rather than acting as subjects, sought to participate as agents by constituting themselves into a *qaum*, a separate religion, the Ad-Dharm. The movement was led by Mangoo Ram, an educated and prosperous Chamar from Hoshiarpur in the 1920s. As many as 4,18,789 lower castes returned themselves as Ad-Dharmis in the 1931 census.[22] The central motif of the Ad-Dharm was unique in the sense that the untouchables constituted a qaum, as a distinct religious community, similar to those of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.[23] The Ad-Dharm claimed a *qaumic* identity rather than a caste identity. This was done in order to undermine the notion of caste because as a caste the Dalits would not be treated on par with other religions. As a quam, the lower castes could enter society as equals; equal to the other religions—whether Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims or Christians.

By coining their distinct symbols, methods and rituals, the Ad-Dharmis in a way rejected the existing religious entities and sought to create their own distinct identity as a religion. The Ad-Dharm adopted the non-theistic notion of divinity and also reclaimed the figure of Sant Ravidas, a medieval saint-poet from the Chamar subcaste. The movement was particularly strong in the areas of Doaba region of present-day Punjab. Though the movement saw its decline very early in the 1940s, it is still considered as a powerful assertion by Dalits for non-caste identity. By imagining itself as a qaum, a distinct religion, the lower castes again articulated religion as a powerful weapon to counter the dominance of the upper castes.

Talhan: Articulating the Sacred as a Political Site

Theoretically, Sikhism, whose origins can be traced as a protest against brahminical structures, rejects the notion of caste and believes in an egalitarian social order. The first Guru, Guru Nanak, while condemning the caste hierarchies said, 'Nonsense are castes and nonsense their names'. He further stated, 'Recognize divine light in everyone. Don't enquire about caste. There is no caste in the next world.'[24] Similarly, by denouncing the practice of Untouchability and introducing the institution of mixed congregations, called *sangat,* where all sat together to hear the Guru's teachings and sing hymns, and by introducing the inter-dining in the sangat and establishing the community kitchens, or the *langar*, where all sat and dined together in one and the same order or *pangat,* the Sikh Gurus sought to establish a social order without the hierarchy of caste, creed or status in social life.[25] The hold of caste was loosened by the appeal of Sikhism but it failed to eradicate the institution of caste from Punjabi society.

Caste still prevails in Punjab. Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Caste population in India as compared to the total population of the state; 28.3 per cent in 1991, which is projected to have increased to about 30 percent as per the 2001 census. At present there are about 37 Scheduled Castes in Punjab. But a large majority of them belong mainly to two castes, generally known as Chamars and Chuhras. Taken together these castes make up for about three-fourths of the entire Dalit population of the state. The followers of Sikhism constitute about 80

to 90 percent of the population in Punjab; Hindus are numerically a minority community as far as communal identities are concerned.

Caste hierarchy in Punjab has been quite different from other parts of the country. Firstly, instead of Brahmins, as is the case in other parts of India, it is the Jats who are at the top of the caste hierarchy in Punjab. As the main landholding caste in Punjab, Jats have also been dominant as far as electoral politics is concerned. Secondly, being the first to convert to Sikhism on a large scale, Jats also occupy significant positions within Sikh religious bodies and institutions. While Sikhism has served as an alternative source of religious identity to the Dalits in Punjab, it could not eradicate the caste hierarchies. The practice of Untouchability has not been that severe as it is in the other parts of the country, still the Dalits face discrimination on the basis of caste.[26]

Recent studies have shown that the Dalits face subtle forms of discrimination in the Gurdwaras. Though there are no restrictions on the entry of the Dalits to the Sikh religious institutions, they are denied equal participation as far as the management and daily activities are concerned.[27] Dalit women are sometimes discouraged from cooking meals for the langar, the community kitchen, and the Dalits are not treated at par with the upper castes in the langar. The Dalits in Punjab, by building separate Gurdwaras, have resisted this discrimination. Almost every Punjabi village has a separate Gurdwara for the Jats and for the Dalits. In some of the Dalit Gurdwaras, a picture of Sant Ravidas, as mentioned earlier, a lower caste saint-poet of medieval times, is kept along with the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. Thus religion is transformed into a space for practising and at the same time countering caste discriminations.

In this background, the caste tensions at the Talhan provide us with a context to understand the role of religion as a political site to assert the voices of the lower castes. The total population of Talhan village is around 4,500. Numerically, the Jats are a minority, comprising 25 percent. Nearly 65 percent are the Ad-Dharmis, the only Scheduled Caste in the village and the rest of the population comes from servicing castes.[28] A shrine of Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh, managed predominantly by the Jats, was the centre of the controversy. The shrine receives around Rs. 5 crore (Rs 50 million) annually in the form of the offerings made by the devotees. The immediate cause of the conflict was a prolonged denial of representation to the Dalits in the manage-

ment elections by the Jats, which led the Dalits to form a parallel management committee.

In retaliation the Jats ordered a social boycott of the Dalits. The boycott was retracted with the realization that it might amount to a legal offence. But the informal boycott continued.[29] The situation turned so serious that the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had to issue notices to the chief secretary and the other higher officials of Punjab government to appear before it on 28 May 2003.[30] Because the government was unable to handle the situation, events took a violent turn when the Dalits came out in the streets. There was large-scale violence which then spread to areas in and around Jalandhar city. A Dalit youth was killed in the police firing and the government had to impose curfew in the violence-ravaged areas of Jalandhar.

Ultimately, the government was successful in making the leadership from both sides sign a peace agreement on 15 June 2003, which among other measures envisaged the inclusion of two members of the Dalit community in the 'original' management committee popularly known as *Nigran* Committee (supervisory committee). The agreement also stated that both the Dalit nominees would have *Sikh Swaroop* (Sikh appearance). Out of these two members, one would later be included in *Maryada* Committee (code of conduct committee) provided he was an *Amritdhari* (baptised, according to the Sikh rituals).[31]

There are many facets to the whole issue of this violent assertion by the Dalits. Many reports have pointed out that the main bone of contention is the huge sum received in the form of offerings which the Jats wished to control. In the Doaba region there have been large-scale migrations to Western countries and hence the area is sometimes called 'NRI Land'.[32] In Talhan too, many of the Dalit families had one or the other members residing abroad. Thereby, the Dalits managed to be economically at par with the traditionally prosperous Jats. The economic prosperity of the Dalits has not been accompanied by any shift in their social status though, and they are still considered socially and culturally inferior by the Jats. The Jats' predominance in the state machinery, the bureaucracy as well as in the police force, has also helped them resist any challenge to their dominance. These are the additional factors that contributed to the eruption of violent protests by the Dalits in Talhan .

The insistence of the Jats that only the *Keshdhari* (wearing all external markers) Dalits could be given representation in the management is also a contentious issue.[33] The argument given by the Jat Sikhs for excluding the Dalits from the managing committee was that there being no Keshdhari Sikhs among the Dalits, it was not proper for them to be members of a Sikh shrine. However, research suggests that the Ad-Dharmis in their everyday practices are much closer to Sikhism, though very few of them ascribe to the bodily symbols of Sikhism.[34] This is not only the case with Dalits but with other communities, including the Jats. But the Jats were not willing to let the Dalits work as part of the Gurdwara management at Talhan even after the much publicized peace pact. The Jat-dominated committee directed one of the two Dalits members of the committee to either partake of *Amrit* (the Sikh baptizing ceremony) or attend the weekly meetings only after his beard grew to full length.

The insistence by Jats for the maintenance of these bodily symbols has some far-reaching repercussions for the Dalit community. It raises the issue of the communal identity of the Dalits as far as Sikhism is concerned. Who is a Sikh? Should only those who partake Amrit and are formally initiated into Sikhism through the ritual of baptism be considered as Sikhs? Then where should one place the numerous castes, especially Dalits, who, though not initiated into the community in a formal manner and who, without wearing the bodily symbols of Sikhism, follow the Sikh tenets as far as their daily lives and rights of passage are concerned? There has always been a syncretic culture in Punjab where the numerous local religio-cultural belief-systems and practices have existed along with the mainstream religions. These local traditions, which are mainly production based, have survived till date in the mainly agrarian economy of the state. But there have been continuous attempts to undermine these local cults in the process of formation of mainstream religions by branding them inferior.

This argument will get substantiated if we look at the contemporary vernacular literature representing this stream of thought and which espouses a distinct 'Sikh' identity. An essay in a vernacular periodical states:

> A major part of the *Qaum* has become superstitious and has come under the influence of the people who indulge

in useless rituals. The observance of truth and the principles of the religious norms have been forgotten by these people. Individual has become god for them and his preachings are given much more importance than the *Gurubani* [the religious teachings as given in Sikh holy book]. In its greed for material gains this section of Sikhs is under influence of superstitious practices and is not ready to follow the spiritual teachings of the Shri Guru Granth Sahib.[35]

This statement aptly reflects the Jat discontentment with non-orthodox observances of the Sikh religious code of conduct by the Sikh masses. The author further expresses his fears regarding the growing influence of the *Deras,* the numerous sects proliferating throughout Punjab, on the Sikh masses and argues for their management according to the tenets of the *Panth.*

Viewed from this background, Talhan provides a fine example of the intermeshing of the religious orthodoxy and caste dominance. The Jats have been successful in converting a shrine revered by all castes located in the village common area into an exclusive religious place of worship in the hands of the traditionally dominant caste.[36] The Jats in Talhan have successfully used the alibi of the lack of 'purity' of the Dalits as a ploy to keep them out of the management of the shrine and to reinforce their dominance and power. This also relates to the orthodox view upheld by the *Damdami Taksal*[37] that only Keshdharis, wearing all the external religious markers, are the 'true' Sikhs.

The assertion in Talhan is thus a limited attempt by the Dalits to challenge the dominance of the upper caste power. By making the Dalits agree to their definition of the 'Sikh' and thus forcing them to adopt external markers in order to reconfirm their faith in Sikhism, the Jats have been successful in dictating their own terms to the Dalits. Nevertheless, Talhan stands out as an important milestone in the struggle for Dalit assertion in Punjab where the boundaries of the sacred are both expanding and constricting at the same time. Historically too, the mass conversions of the Chuhras to Christianity in the nineteenth century or the Rahita Sikhs' conversions to the Arya Samaj in the later part of the nineteenth century, or the coinage of a new religion, the Ad-Dharm, by the Chamars in the early twentieth century, like the recent struggle for a substantial role in the management of a religious shrine

by the Dalits in Talhan, reveal that in Punjab, the sacred has always been an important domain for exposing the fine and subtle modes of discrimination by the dominant upper castes. By politicizing this sacred domain, the Dalits have sought to contest the caste hierarchies in their vision of a just and egalitarian society for themselves.

Notes

1. Tribune News Service (2003): 'Healing Touch' to woo Dalits', *The Tribune*, 9 June 2003.
2. Tribune News Service (2003): 'SGPC sets up Probe Panel', *The Tribune*, 8 June 2003.
3. Arjun Sharma, 'The Attack of Christianity on the Land of the Gurus', *Pathic Sandesh* (April 2003): 9.
4. K. C. Sudarshan, 'The Question of the Crisis of Identity', *Pathic Sandesh* (April 2003): 16.
5. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 218.
6. Ibid: 220.
7. Kenneth W. Jones, 'Hum Hindu Nahin: The Arya Sikh Relations', The *Punjab Past and Present,* 11, Part 2 (1977): 22: 341.
8. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988): 184.
9. Traditionally, Chuhras are the sweepers and scavengers castes. Those who converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhabis.The term 'Mazhabi' is derived from the time when three Chuhra Hindus rescued the body of the ninth guru, Guru Teg Bahadur. These sweepers, on their return to Amritsar with the corpse, were at once baptized into the Sikh faith by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who called them Mazhabi or the Faithful. See Ethne K. Marenco, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society.' In *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements,* edited by Joseph T. O. Connell (Shimla: Institute of Advanced Studies, 1999): 130.
10. Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels:* 184.
11. See John C. B. Webster, 'Leadership in a Rural Dalit Conversion Movement'. In Connell, ed., *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*: 96; see also Marenco, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society': 258.

12. Ibid: p. 54.
13. Not only was caste present among the Sikhs, but also the nature of hierarchy differed from that of the Hindu caste system. There was a struggle for supremacy in the Sikh community between the Jat Sikhs and the Khatri Sikhs. For details see Marenco, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society': 54–55.
14. Webster, 'Leadership in a Rural Dalit Conversion Movement': 103.
15. For details see Satish Kumar Sharma, *Social Movements and Social Change: A Study of Arya Samaj and Untouchables in Punjab* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1965).
16. Ibid: 95.
17. Muslims were considered to be lower than both the Hindus and the Sikhs. One could be ex-communicated from the community for marrying a Muslim. The Lahore Shuddhi Sabha in 1896, purified a group of outcast Sikhs whose common great grandfather was ex-communicated for his liaison with a Muslim woman. For more details see Jones, 'Hum Hindu Nahin': 342.
18. Ibid: 346-47.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid: 348.
21. Ibid: 350.
22. Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab:* 77.
23. Ibid: 45.
24. Ganda Singh, 'Development of Sikh Thought up to the End of the Eighteenth Century', *Punjab Past and Present* 2, Part 1, 3 (April 1968): 13.
25. Ibid: 14.
26. See Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Prejudice Without Pollution? Scheduled Castes in Contemporary Punjab', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 12, 3 and 4 (2000): 381-402.
27. Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab', *EPW* 37, 19 (11 May 2002): 1817.
28. Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Caste Tensions in Punjab: Talhan and Beyond', *EPW* (12 June 2003).
29. Varinder Walia and Rashmi Talwar (2003): 'Rich Dalits' Desire for Equality Led to Clash, says report', *The Tribune*, 28 July 2003.
30. Naveen S. Grewal, 'Was Talhan Violence Pre- Planned?', *The Tribune,* 8 June 2003.
31. Varinder Singh,: 'Jats, Dalits Sign Peace Agreement', *The Tribune,* 15 June 2003.
32. The report of the investigative team constituted to probe the events at Talhan, *Tarksheel* July-Aug 2003.

33. Jodhka, 'Caste Tensions in Punjab': 2924.
34. A. H. Bingley, *Sikhs* (Shimla: Government of India, Central Printing Office, 1899; reprint, Patiala: Government of Punjab, Department of Languages, 1970.): 69-119.
35. Giani Kewal Singh, 'What to Do for the Honour of Shri Guru Granth Sahib', *Gurumat Chetna* (Dec 2001): 19.
36. 'Talhan: A Joint Fact-finding by AFDR (Punjab) and PUDR (Delhi)', Nov 2003: 8-9. Unpublished and internally circulated report of People's Union for Democratic Rights, a human rights group based in Delhi.
37. It is to be noted here that Damdami Taksal is considered to be the ultra-right seminary of the Sikhs.

13

Hindutva and Dalits in Andhra Pradesh

K. S. Chalam

Introduction

Andhra Pradesh as an independent state came into existence in 1956 because of the reorganization of states on linguistic basis by bringing the four different regions into one unit. The coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema which formed a part of the old Madras Presidency and the Telugu-speaking Nizam princely state called Telangana were joined together to form present-day Andhra Pradesh. Culturally and agro-climatically, however, the state is not a homogeneous entity. Coastal Andhra Pradesh with the two rich deltas of Krishna and Godavari forms the hegemonic component of the state. Though the north Andhra part of the state, which was historically the major part of Kalinga, is considered as coastal Andhra, it had altogether a different background. Rayalaseema with its culture of poligar (a form of vassal, of a feudal age) and factionalism is different from Telangana with its rich composite culture of Muslim and Hindu traditions. The Dalits residing in different parts of the state have also inherited these differences in culture. Therefore, it is difficult to project Andhra Pradesh and the Dalit inhabitants of the state as homogeneous, though the dominant Dalit leadership does so. The reason for this is not difficult to find. Since most of the contemporary Dalit leaders come from a single region, the coastal Andhra, it perceives the entire Dalit population as homogeneous. Similarly, Hindutva culture and its spread in the state of Andhra Pradesh is not uniform. This is to be kept in mind while making generalizations about Andhra Pradesh.

What Is Hindutva?

Hindutva is generally conceptualized as Hindu fundamentalism (see also Introduction and Essays 2, 3). The way in which Hindutva is perceived and explained by Western scholars and unquestionably accepted by Indian scholars needs to be re-examined. Hinduism as *sanatana dharma* was propagated and to some extent supported by the English and other European scholars in the past. Even today, such theories exist which are totally misguided and to some extent mischievous. They tend to see Indo-Aryans as belonging to their own racial stock and hence superior to other natives. It was the English in the eighteenth century who revived the *sanatana dharma* of the Aryans by encouraging some of the so-called 'patrons of the Aryan myth'. It was the British who established the Asiatic Society for studies on Hindu dharma and its 'great contribution' to human civilization. They did not put Hinduism to any critical analysis and the word 'Hinduism' itself was coined by the Europeans. It was only the European Marxist scholars and not the Indian scholars who have critically examined Hinduism as a form of religion. It was scholars such as Walter Ruben who brought out the materialistic component of so-called Hinduism and tried to relate that component to the toiling masses of the country. Except for the late D. P. Chattopadhyay and a few others, no one has seriously attempted to expose the materialistic basis of Hinduism. Hinduism is now propagated by many as a way of life. But they do not qualify which way of life—Materialistic or Idealistic?

The discussion on the materialistic component of the way of life of Hindus in which the Dalits have a central role has not been put to any evaluation by the mainstream scholars. It is necessary to mention it here because the materialistic way of life, as now interpreted by me[1] has been practised sincerely by the South Indians, particularly Andhras, for a long period of time. However, they are clubbed together with that of idealistic Hindus. In fact, some of the Christian missionaries have aimed at these practices and destroyed the indigenous culture. That is the reason why the Dalits are now groping in the dark without any cultural and civilizational roots. They are shown either as idealistic Hindus or as pagans. If we read some of the anthropological writings of the English missionaries, it will be abundantly clear that they have narrated the culture and belief systems of the indigenous people with

contempt. One can notice a similarity in the missionary chronicles. (This is a serious project that independent Dalit scholars need to take up for study.) It is essential to point out here that in Andhra the Dalit tradition is unique and quite different from that of the misguided Dalits of Gujarat and elsewhere where they are used by the Hindutva forces.

Hindutva as conceptualized by elite Brahmins is the belief in the primacy of the Vedas and the process of Sanskritization. They have not distinguished between Vedic Hinduism and other forms of Hinduism which the Brahmins have assimilated from the indigenous people into mainstream Hinduism. Indeed, the Hindutva that is practised and popularized by the Sangh Parivar is purely a brahminical conspiracy. The primary duty of Hindutva is to uphold the supremacy of the purohit (priest) and the Brahmin. This is to be distinguished from that of the hundred ways in which the Dalits and others practice religion. No Dalit or even an OBC person worships Laxminarayana or Rama or Krishna every day or even once in a month. It is only the *dwija* (twice born, i.e., Brahmins and other so-called upper castes) communities and in recent times the upper Shudras who worship these brahminical gods in several parts of Andhra Pradesh. The Dravidians have their own ways of worship, their own festivals like Onam, and so on, which are unique and do not form a part of Hinduism. In fact some of the forms of worship and festivals like Onam are against brahminical Hinduism.

The categorization of Hindutva into hard and soft versions in the print media is done without any substantial theoretical analysis. It appears that the hard Hindutva is one where the policies and programmes are foisted by hardcore Brahmins. In the case of soft Hindutva, the policies and programmes are formulated in a more subtle manner where other castes are seen to participate along with the Brahmins to achieve the same goal of restoring power to Brahmins and the upper castes.

Hindutva in Andhra

If we look at the Hindutva as pure Brahminism, it will be clear to us that this Hindutva was not very much prevalent in Andhra Pradesh. It is established by scholars that the South Indian Brahmins, particularly Andhra Brahmins, came from north and northwest India. There is a

strong tradition of the Desastha and Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra migrating to Andhra for centuries. Some of the Brahmins from Kasi and other religious places migrated to Andhra during the period of the Cholas. Some of them got married to native non-Brahmin women. Therefore, we can see in Andhra several divisions among the Brahmins apart from the major Vaidika and Niyoga sects. By the time the Brahmins established their hegemony with the patronage of the native rulers, more particularly in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, the Dalits were practising their own religion. The conflict among Saivas and Vaishnavas—the Alwars—have created space for penetration of the mainstream belief systems among the Dalits. Before it was consolidated, the region came under Muslim rule in the medieval period. Most of the Muslim converts, if systematically analysed, were found to be untouchables.

The demographic data of Telangana and Rayalaseema reveal that Muslims and Dalits constitute one fourth of the population. In districts and regions where the Muslim population is high, the Dalit population is lower, maintaining the one-fourth component of this population. This kept the spread of the hegemony of brahminical Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh under control. If there were any atrocities on Dalits, they were directed by the Shudras. Unlike Maharashtra during the Peshwa period, no such brutal feudal Hindu rule could be seen in all parts of Andhra to implement the brahminical agenda of Hindutva. There were certainly isolated pockets of brahminical hegemony in the Godavari and the Krishna deltas. This has helped the Christian missionaries to enter the region for proselytization and they converted the majority of the Dalits into Christianity in the rich coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. It was estimated by scholars like Forrester that 20 percent of depressed classes (as the OBCs were earlier called) in west Godavari, 32 percent in Krishna, and 57 percent in Guntur district got converted to Christianity by 1931.[2]

In the Telangana region, the Muslim rulers held sway over six centuries. There were two categories of Muslims, one native Bahamani Sultans and the other were Mughal migrants from the north. They had quarrels among themselves. The Brahmins took advantage of this and joined the administration. Some of the Brahmins were patronized by the Muslim rulers. As they were under the control of the Muslim rulers, they could not implement their own agenda. They could do it

with the help of the native Deshmukhs or Patels (the landlords and village administrator respectively) who by and large were Shudras of the Reddy and the Velama communities. These zamindars used to practise Hindu rituals at home but in the company of the Nizam they would behave differently. Therefore, there was no strong foundation for Brahminism or, later, a movement like Hindutva.

The situation in Rayalaseema was, however, interesting. All the important temples of the state including Sri Venkateswara at Tirupathi, Srisailam, Kalahasti, and so on, are located in this region. Further, the region has a distinction of providing a large number of modern-day Babas or saints including Satya Sai Baba in Anantapur. But the situation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was different. The rebel leaders and reformists who questioned brahminical Hinduism like Vemana, Veerabrahmendra Swamy came from this region. There is also a considerable Muslim population in this region. Therefore, the region has remained an enigma of Hinduism.

North Andhra is unique in its approach to religion and way of life. As a part of ancient Kalinga, the land that taught Ashoka Buddhism, the people here have been practitioners of the simple way of life which is devoid of hard core brahminical pactices. It is still a part of the way of life of the people here. This may be one of the reasons for the emergence of large number of progressive writers and thinkers of the state in the modern period including Sri Sri and Gurajada from this region.[3] Thus we are left with coastal Andhra, the fertile ground for agriculture, feudal ideas and Hindutva.

Reform, Left Movements and Dalits

Interestingly, no reform movement or progressive movement has originated from this delta region. It was only Tripuraneni Rama Swamy who, as a contemporary of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, started questioning the supremacy of Brahmins and the Hindu scriptures.[4] Similarly, the first Dalit poet of modern India, Joshua, led a similar attack against Hindu scriptures.[5] But the reform movement of Gurajada, Kandukuri, Gidigu Rama Murthy was found to be wider and deeper and came from within brahminical orthodoxy.[6] This had promoted several young and dynamic leaders to join the Brahmo Samaj, and the national independence struggle of Gandhi. Some of them have sincerely carried

the Gandhian 'Harijan upliftment' programme. The Brahmos carried inter-caste and inter-dinning among the Dalits and upper castes. Though it was not a dominant upsurge, its impact was to convert Hindutva to 'soft Hindutva'.

The contribution of Indian communists and the Naxalbari movement in preventing expansion of Hindutva in the state appears to be very little. According to K. G. Satya Murthy, former general secretary, CPI (ML) PWG (whom I met on 20 Feb 2004 in Visakhapatnam), 'The Marxists never considered caste and religion as important issues. Theoretically the People's War Group (PWG)-struggle is still premised on the primacy of economic factors, in which religion and caste are considered as superstructural issues.' He lamented that he was quite unsuccessful in the party in raising the issue of caste discrimination and exploitation. He said that there was not even a single piece of writing criticizing Hindutva and caste discrimination by any of the prominent Naxalite leaders. Even the personal and family lives of topmost communists have remained Hindu.

It is clear that the communist parties, both parliamentary as well as non-parliamentary ones, have not considered the danger of Hindutva as a formidable issue in Andhra. Therefore, they have not developed any anti-Hindutva plank within themselves. There is not even a strong organization to promote secular values and to fight Hindutva in Andhra. Though there are a few humanist, rationalist, anti-religion and anti-superstition mass organizations that have carried the work of communists, their contribution in preventing the onslaught of Hindutva and neoliberal globalization is almost zero. On the other hand, the CPI (M) has recently supported the controversial categorization of tribals in Andhra due to the problems of intra-tribal differentiation. Therefore, it is difficult to acknowledge contribution of communists to the anti–Hindutva agenda in positive terms.

The greatest contribution of Andhra to the emancipation of the poor and the Dalits has been in the form of the Telangana and the Srikakulam movements in modern India. These movements significantly enriched the theory and practice of the revolutionary politics. The Telangana armed struggle during the 1950s made the Dalits, Muslims and Hindus unite to wage a war against the oppressors, the Nizam and the landlords of Telangana. There are instances where the Muslims built temples for Hindus and Hindus built mosques for

Muslims. They buried their religion and caste in the process of armed struggle. There is no doubt, it was short-lived and it did have its weaknesses. The camaraderie that it brought about however did not allow the communal forces to raise their head in the region. The situation made the feudal lords migrate to Hyderabad. These feudal lords became staunch supporters of Hinduism after the reorganization of the state with the state headquarters in Hyderabad. The birthplace of Hindutva being Maharashtra, which borders Telangana, the emergence of Hindutva became imminent in Hyderabad. The concentration of a large number of Muslims in Hyderabad city became a bone of contention for the Hindutva forces to strengthen its hold in Hyderabad city and neighbouring districts. Hyderabad became the capital city of the state and provided opportunities of concentration of the ruling elite and the bureaucracy. Brahmins have started concentrating in Hyderabad city. This helped the Hindutva forces to consolidate their position in the state. It is from Hyderabad that Hindutva started spreading to other places in the form of swamijis, *matts* (ashrams or shrines), NGOs and other forms of religious organizations by the end of 1980s.

Liberalization and Open Hindutva

The Telangana armed struggle and the creation of new opportunities in the urban areas made the Brahmins in the rural areas migrate to urban centres. This trend facilitated the so-called land reform movement in Andhra mostly to help the Agraharas (Brahmin villages with fertile land donated by kings in support of a shrine) to convert their immovable property into cash. In several cases, however, court litigation did not help them. But the concentration of Brahmins, mostly those who are attached to temples, the Vaidikas in the urban areas, resorted to their traditional occupation of priesthood. They have buried their skirmishes with their fellow Niyogi Brahmins and together they have formed cohesive religious institutions. This could be seen as a secular occupational organization as long as they were confined to their traditional ritual functions. But the situation in the urban areas has changed with the anti-Mandal agitation of the 1980s against reservation for the OBCs which these organizations directly and indirectly sponsored.

The triumph of the Babri Masjid demolition in which Andhra tribals were mobilized in large numbers by the Sangh Parivar gave confidence to the so-called Brahmin organizations to participate directly in political activity. The Sangh Parivar took advantage of the organized caste groups in the state and began its activities through them. The number of temples and religious establishments in the urban areas of Andhra Pradesh increased several fold during the last decade. Once a small religious establishment set up on a street corner, with an unemployed Brahmin as a priest, it would slowly start getting patronage of the local upper castes and in some cases the OBCs. Such establishments would become a permanent asset to provide employment. It would be supported by the Sangh Parivar to thwart any kind of attack on the religious establishment. Recently this has become an important process of Hindutva formation in Andhra. North Andhra had been a region of progressive movements, including the Naxalbari movement in Srikakulam. Having considered the historical significance, the Sangh Parivar transplanted a retired official who worked in the police department to mobilize resources in the east coast with headquarters at Bhimili near Visakhapatnam. This became a centre of the Sangh Parivar activities where the top RSS brass often met.

Today there is a total change in the perception of Kammas, the ruling caste of Andhra. They were the people who fought against Brahmins during the first half of the twentieth century and they have supported and even led Left parties. They were called the materialists of the twentieth century in Andhra. But after the advent of N. T. Rama Rao (NTR) as a leader of the state, there was a sudden change in the perception of progressive Kammas. The majority have started patronizing swamis, babas and even built temples. They have become deeply religious. There is almost total acceptance of Hindutva when the BJP came to power at the centre. Though it may be a convenient adjustment for economic gains, the Hindutva forces are more intelligent than the Kammas and therefore they have used this space to strengthen their hold on the urban elite. The soft attitude towards Brahmins after 1993 (once hard posture) by the NTR parivar has created opportunities for Hindutva to strengthen its hold in the urban areas of Andhra Pradesh. The junior partners of present state power in Andhra, the Reddys, have always been feudal in their outlook and did not pose problems for Hindutva. As the cream of Reddy leadership came from Telangana,

the Brahmins have been maintaining very good relations with them. In other words, state power has slowly converted the ruling castes to join hands with the once secular Brahmin caste organizations to absorb Hindutva ideology.

Once the powerful ruling castes are converted to Hindutva, the castes that act as musclemen of these elites, mostly the OBCs—Yadava, Gouda, Velama, Kapu—are slowly coopted. The Dalits have remained as a separate entity. They have remained so not because of their independent agenda and programme. It is perhaps because they are under the overwhelming control of Christianity. It is only in Andhra Pradesh, in comparison with the entire country according to some surveys, that the Christians continue to claim reservations as Scheduled Castes but remain as Christians in faith and customs. This is true particularly in the coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. It is slowly entering Telangana and North Andhra. As the survival of Christian identity depends upon its opposition to Hinduism, some activists are using both the platforms to oppose Hindutva. But the problem is that when the Dalits are attacked, and discriminated against, the police refuse to book cases under PCR (Protection of Civil Rights Act) as most of the victims are Christians and not untouchable Dalits. Meanwhile Hindutva forces tell the Dalits that Hinduism was never against Dalits. Some writers argue in the mainstream press that Vyasa, Valmiki, Arundhati, and others belong to the Dalit category and that Hinduism respects them. This is how they are trying to woo the Dalits.

Mala-Madiga Division and Hindutva

The emergence of intra-caste differentiation among the Dalits in India has been a serious topic for discussion among academics for quite sometime. As I have pointed out earlier, it led to the fragmentation of Dalit assertion in Andhra after the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres.[7] Out of 59 castes in the Scheduled Castes list of Andhra Pradesh, two castes have emerged as dominant, the Malas and the Madigas. In fact these two castes are not dominant in all the regions of the state. They were dominant in coastal Andhra and have emerged as contending forces in the region over a period of time. These castes had united and led a historical struggle under the aegis of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha to counter the hegemonic dominance of Kamma and

Reddy communal forces in the state. As the upsurge of the Dalits was culminating into a formidable movement in the state, Kanshi Ram entered the state politics. Dalit youth, the discontented Dalit communists, Ambedkarities, the newly emerging Dalit elite had joined the ranks of the BSP. NTR had considered the BSP as a formidable force at that time. The Shudra upper castes were terrified by the unity among the Dalits and their ideological postures to bring the OBCs also into their political fold. Having realized the implication of the outcome of such a formation, the BJP, which had its presence in the Telangana region raised the issue of intra-caste differentiation between Malas and Madigas. The BJP had some pockets of influence among the Madigas in Hyderabad. After NTR, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) had severed its connections with the Left parties and joined the BJP in the state. The TDP according to some, had picked up the thread from the BJP and almost sponsored the Mala-Madiga division to weaken the strength of Dalit power in the state.

The Madigas and the Malas have since formed their separate caste associations. The Madigas wanted the SC category of reservations to be divided among the sub-castes of the SCs while the Malas have opposed it. The TDP had issued a Government Order categorizing the SCs into four groups at the time when the total strength of the civil administration was dwindling. Though the Mala-Madiga movement appeared to be a state-level struggle, in its essence it was confined to the coastal districts and limited to the organized state government employees. But the struggle gave a rude shock to the united Dalit assertion. Interestingly, this did not benefit Hindutva as many had expected. It seems, three important factors have contributed to this situation: firstly, the Madiga leadership soon realized the futility of the division without there being enough public jobs available for reservation. Secondly, the sudden and disgraceful manner in which Bangaru Laxman, a Madiga leader, was thrown out of the BJP presidentship gave a jolt to the community. Thirdly, the vocal segments of both the groups had already converted into Christianity and were not inclined to join the bandwagon of Hindutva. As a result, the age old strategy of the Hindutva forces of 'dividing, assimilating and then ruling' did not materialize in the case of Mala-Madiga division in Andhra Pradesh. But it may not be the same in other regions like Karnataka where similar attempts are being made by the communal forces. Except

Boyi Bhimanna, a prominent poet among the Malas, who has reinterpreted the Bhagavat Gita in a brahminical tenor, today no one is inclined to join the Hindu parivar.

The first Dalit president of the BJP Bangaru Laxman, it is said, has been moulded by the Hindutva forces from his childhood. Recently, a former IPS officer Balakondayya, a Mala, has joined the BJP. But none of them seem to be enthusiatic about the agenda of Hindutva. Bangaru Laxman is reported to have now become disillusioned with the BJP. Therefore, the influence of Hindutva forces among the Dalits appears weak at the moment. But the strength of Hindutva should never be seen in here and now; it lies in its long run vision and its perseverance to pursue it.

Conclusion

Hindutva as a brahminical ideology has been in existence in Andhra in a nascent form because of the geographical and historical conditions. However, hard-core Hindutva forces have started entering into civil space almost piggy-backing the policies of liberalization and the expansion of the service sector in urban areas after 1990s. The influence of communists, including the Naxalites whose presence in the state has been most significant on the secular values of people in general and Dalits in particular is now marginal. The fact that unlike other states, the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh remained largely outside the scheme of Hindutva is primarily beacuse the majority of them is already converted to Islam or Christianity. Hindutva forces tried to woo a section of Dalits by engineering a division in the reservation quota but could not make much headway. There are signs that they are making overtures to even Muslim and Christian Dalits, taking advantage of the historical cleavages in Dalit identity. There are some weaknesses in the formation of Dalit identity in Andhra as some Christians call other Dalits as *'anyulu'* (outsiders) and are slowly alienating themselves from the Dalit experiences. This can be used by Hindutva in dividing the Dalits into separate blocks to create a foothold for themselves. They have succeeded in dividing the 59 Dalit castes into ABCD (categorization in SC reservation) groups but failed to accomplish their objective of winning over sizeable number of Dalits. Dalits in Andhra Pradesh appear to have understood the evil design of the Hindutva forces. Even those

Dalits who were attracted towards the Hindutva forces have managed to stay away and in a way entire Dalit-community is undergoing a phase of introspection. The Dalit renaissance movement in Andhra has just begun. It is left to the posterity to decide in which direction it will lead the Dalit masses!

Notes

1. K. S. Chalam, 'Tantra: The Origin of Dalit Epistemology', *South India Journal of Social Sciences* 1, 1 (June 2003).
2. Duncan B. Forrester, *'The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity: 1860-1990.'* In *Religion in South Asia,* edited by G. A. Oddie (Delhi: Manohar, 1977).
3. Sri Sri and Gurajada are progressive modern Telugu writers, *Gurajadas Anyasulkam* (bride price) was published in 1915 abhorring evil social practices in the Telugu country.
4. Tripuraneni Rama Swamy is known as the Periyar of Andhra. He started the rationalist movement and questioned brahminical traditions and scriptures
5. Gurram Joshua is perhaps the first Dalit poet of modern India. See *History of Telugu Literature* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1975).
6. V. Ramakrishna, *Social Reforms in Andhra* (Delhi: Vikas, 1983).
7. K. S. Chalam, 'The Fragmented Assertion: The Emergence of Intra-Caste Differention among Dalits in India', accessional paper: SRTRI, August 1997, Hyderabad.

14

Hindutva's Influence on Dalits: The Case of Karnataka

Shivasundar

To understand the Dalits response to Hindutva in Karnataka, one will have to contextualize the phenomenon both at the national as well as at the Karnataka levels. In Karnataka, the Dalits and the Dalit movement are influenced by the various developments at the national level. Their trajectory thereafter is of course governed by factors particular to Karnataka. To begin with, the Dalit movement led by Dr. Ambedkar in Maharashtra and later at the national level had very little influence over the Dalit movement in Karnataka, the only exception being Gulbarga area, where Mr. Shamsundar led a very powerful Ambedkarite movement. He is still remembered there as the Ambedkar of Karnataka. The Dalit movement led by him, however, did not extend beyond the surrounding area. In the absence of an organizational succession, even this influence could not last after his death.

The politicization of Dalits, if at all it can be called so, came basically from the upper caste patrons of the Congress Party through its so-called constructive programmes to uplift Harijans. The Congress patronage did not have any intention of inculcating self-confidence among Dalits; rather it was directed to reinforce their dependence on the upper castes. The other major political current around Karnataka, like the communist movement, self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu or the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh, which questioned the pro-feudal programme and brahminical attitude of the Congress and mobilized the Dalits under different political agendas, were visibly absent in Karnataka. Another sub-current, namely, Kannada

nationalism, that came to the fore in Karnataka was from the beginning, strongly influenced by Tilak's steam of 'Congressism' that leant towards caste-based feudalism with a strong Hindu cultural nationalist discourse.

The leaders of Karnataka nationalism were all from upper caste background. Even though the pioneers of the movement like Alur Venkatarao and others asserted Kannada nationalist aspirations, they declared complete adherence to the Hindu nationalist construction of Indian nationalism. They wore the medals given by the establishment and never came in support of the growing voices of workers and farmers in the freedom movement. Rather, they aligned more and more with the sworn feudal elements in the Congress movement. Thus, it completely failed to voice aspirations of Dalits. The Telangana movement in the Hyderabad-Karnataka (comprising districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur districts) region had a very strong anti-Muslim bias unlike Andhra,where it was basically expressed as the anti-feudal programme mobilizing Dalits on an alternate political agenda of armed struggles. In the south (comprising districts of Kolar, Bangalore, Mandya, Mysore, South Canara, Shimoga, Chikkamagalore, Chitradurga, and so on), it was basically a state patronized non-Brahmin movement of Other Backward Classes which did not include Dalits.

None of these alternative currents during the freedom movement took the Dalit agenda to the fore and mobilized Dalits against the caste system. Therefore, Dalit consciousness in Karnataka by and large remained confined within the ideological boundaries of Harijan *consciousness.* Apart from the absence of the political movements, the absence or insignificant numerical strength of the Dalit middle class with its own identity and agendas was also an important feature of the pre-1947 period in Karnataka.

In the post-1947 period also, Karnataka continued to be the bastion of the Congress Party and its ideology. In fact, Karnataka faced a political lull, as did other states in India, in the first two decades after independence. Constitutional reservations brought about a new Dalit middle class and the Green Revolution saw the rise of new agrarian classes in the political arena. While the Okkaligas and other landholding classes enriched by the new agrarian economy began demanding their share in the economy and power structures, the Dalit middle class (which was still weak numerically and politically) slowly began

asserting its identity. The Devraj Urs government that came to power during this time (early 1970s) significantly helped the crystallization of this process.

While the consolidation of landholding classes did not result in new political formations, as the Congress was able to contain them within its ambit, a section of the enlightened middle classes from the OBCs as well as from the Dalits tried to articulate progressive aspirations outside Congress politics. They found a new ideological anchor in Ram Manohar Lohia. The Lohiaite political ideology with its strong anti-Congressism and strong pro-tenant programme with specific emphasis on the annihilation of caste, caught the imagination of these forces which later provided the basis for the emergence of the Janata Party in Karnataka. The weak communist movement, by then completely engrossed in parliamentary politics, with no roots in rural Karnataka and wrong perspective on the caste question, proved utterly inconsequential during these critical times. It was already overwhelmed by the strong anti-communist wave of Lohiaite socialism. These circumstances prevented the emergence of radical Dalit politics in the state.

It was only in the late 1970s that Dalit politics started to take the Ambedkarite path. The emergence of Dalit politics and its transformation from servile Harijan consciousness to Ambedkarite consciousness can be analysed in such a historical context. The new emerging Dalit middle class was to play an important role in the growth of Dalit politics and in the formation of the Dalit Sangharsha Samithi (DSS) subsequently. Even though this Dalit consciousness sprouted in the soil of anti-Congressism and a Lohiaite ideology, it grew under the strong influence of radical ideologies like that of the Dalit Panthers and the Naxalites. The Naxalite influence helped the Dalit movement to take the anti-caste-movement away from the Lohiaite cultural and super-structural space to the anti-feudal base. Armed with this radical consciousness, the DSS launched its struggle not only for the self- respect of Dalits, but also for the creation of an alternate society with a kind of socialist vision, that may be characterized by an ideological mixture of Marx, Lohia and Ambedkar. This radical Dalit discourse attracted all progressive forces belonging to several castes and ideological persuasions towards the DSS. It initiated several important land

struggles and linked the Dalit question as a quest for self-respect and for social and economic emancipation. The Dalit agenda was thus catapulted from the margins to the mainstream politics of Karnataka.

There was, however, an inherent tension in the new Dalit leadership about the course of the struggle and political alliances it had to make. While one section of the leadership was always inclined towards making compromises for sharing political power, the other sections, aware of the problems with this course, were hesitant. Although they managed to stay away from the proponents of power sharing, they could not chart out a new path. The resultant confusion provided a fertile ground for opportunist alliances in electoral politics, which was best exploited by the Janata Dal for coming to power in 1983 and again in 1985 under the leadership of an astute and scheming politician like Ramkrishna Hegde.

It was during his regime that many social movements having radical potential were coopted into the state power. The opportunist forces in these organizations were promoted and incorporated. Opportunism was elevated to a level of political tactics. Such an open allurement for power brought in fissures within the rank and file of the leadership of the DSS, which subsequently led to multiple splits in the organization and also blurred the distinction between friends and foes. It opened the floodgates of opportunistic alliances and changed the orientation of the movement from the grass-root Dalit to positions of power. The inevitable corruption and imperatives of power politics slowly took away the organization from the path of struggle. This descent did more damage to Dalit politics than anything else. The Dalit masses and, in particular, the youth with huge potential, were rendered suddenly leaderless and rudderless. Added to this, was the emergence of a kind of narrow and sectarian political and ideological current within the Dalit movement. This sectarian and casteist politics and political opportunism were promoted by a corrupt section of the upcoming Dalit middle class with the blessings of the Dalit bureaucracy. This section is being encouraged by the ruling classes in the state and pitted against the radical and moderate forces within Dalit politics. This sectarianism basically served as a defence mechanism for staving off the 'undesired' influence of progressive people, which further alienated the Dalit movement and isolated its leadership from the radical path.

Thus, by the late 1990s, Dalit organizations had mostly shifted to

towns and cities with political opportunism and fundamentalism as the principal course. It was during the same period that the impact of the policies of globalization had started being felt by the Dalit masses. Globalization unleashed a process of pauperization and impoverishment of the masses, making them increasingly vulnerable to the vagaries of the market forces and economic policies of the government linked to the imperialist agenda. The worst impact of globalization has been in marginalization of people's struggles. Paradoxically, the decline in peoples' struggles has happened at the time when they are most required. The transformation from a 'welfare state'[1] to a neoliberal one with no social responsibility whatsoever and with increasingly repressive orientations has pushed the moderate social movements to be on the defensive. Challenged by the neoliberal state, many social movements succumbed to its pressure and the lure of corruption. The Dalit movement was no exception to this trend. Rather, the newly born Dalit fundamentalism, while vociferously contesting the claims and contentions of progressives enthusiastically capitulated to the anti-Dalit state and did not have qualms in forming alliances even with the Hindu communal forces, the sworn enemies of the Dalits.

The emergence of the BSP in Dalit politics has successfully provided an ideological justification for the careerist and opportunist tendencies among a section of Dalit leadership. Such manipulative politics not only played havoc on progressive Dalit consciousness, but also paved the way for the entry of Hindutva into it. For instance, BSP leaders portray the RSS not as a communal organization with fascist objectives and with an inherent anti-Dalit agenda, but as a disciplined patriotic cultural organization. It indoctrinates hatred against all other castes in the name of Manuvadis. It dissuades Dalits from joining any secular movement because it does not think it is of any use to them. They reject political mobilization for struggles and deeply inculcate hero worship. During the ill-fated BJP-BSP alliance and Mayawati's endorsement of the Modi government in Gujarat in the wake of all round condemnation for its role in the genocide of Muslims, the justifications of the anti-Muslim sentiments reached the peak. Such indoctrination takes its own course. While Hindu communalism gets legitimized in the eyes of Dalits, an anti-Muslim frenzy does the rest. Both these processes, unfortunately, could be observed in Karnataka. As one worried Dalit intellectual of Karnataka, Indudhara Honnapura

described it, these days everything in the repertoire of Hindutva, save for the caste hierarchy, becomes acceptable to this brand of Dalit politics in the state.

It is in this context that Hindu fundamentalist forces started their overtures to woo Dalits. As elsewhere, they first began with coopting Ambedkar, the greatest icon for Dalits, as one among the Hindutva-leaders. The outfits of the Sangh Parivar soon began to occupy the social spaces vacated by the progressive social movements, including Dalit organizations. The moving away of the latter from confrontationist politics provided space to these Hindutva organizations to fill in the communal venom and display their masculine valour against the hapless minority communities. The depoliticization of the Dalit cadre made way for the indoctrination by the Hindutva forces through the RSS shakhas in urban slums and rural areas. The overall legitimacy that the Hindu communal forces gained is primarily due to the bankruptcy of other political forces. The cooptation of Dalit leaders has certainly contributed to this phenomenon.

The influence of Hindutva over the Dalit masses in Karnataka should be located in this political context. Two recent developments can illustrate this phenomenon. In 2003, there was a communal clash in a village in the Haveri district of Karnataka in which several Muslims were killed and their households were burnt. Bajrang Dal activists who came from a neighbouring district had instigated this. The reason was, as usual, a flimsy one. But the communities they mobilized to instigate the clash were all Dalits. The graveyards of the Dalits and the Muslims in that village are situated side by side. Bajrang Dal instigated the Dalits by saying that the Muslims were encroaching upon their graveyard. The Dalits were instigated to block the approach road to the Muslims' graveyard unless they handed over the alleged encroached patch of land. This created tension that later led to the said clashes. The human rights group that investigated the incident concluded that the Dalit masses because of the lack of leadership are susceptible to the propaganda of communal forces like the Bajrang Dal.

In another very recent development, an important Dalit leader who was a communist earlier and who was widely respected not only by the Dalits masses but also by others has recently joined the BJP. These two developments explain the situation in Karnataka.

Reasons for the Growth of Hindutva amongst Dalits

Absence of any progressive mobilizations of Dalits

It is now more than a decade that any mobilization of rural Dalit masses has taken place outside the electoral framework and for other democratic agendas like the land question and so on. Even urban Dalits are not mobilized on a common cause as they are divided into several factions. Some of the leaders are engaged in real estate deals while others are using Dalit masses to bargain with the powers that be. There are no attempts whatsoever by the Dalit movement for radical politicization or mobilization of Dalits against the caste system. Had this been done it would have been difficult for the Sangh Parivar to make inroads into Dalits. The popular perception today is that during the decade of the 1980s educated and urban Dalit leaders would mobilize rural Dalits and other oppressed sections against upper caste landlords, and in the process, forge a powerful united front between rural and urban, Dalits and other democratic sections. However, the present-day Dalit leaders are found only in taluka and district level offices. Thus the vacuum created in rural areas is being easily filled by Hindutva forces.

Organized intervention of Sangh Parivar among the Dalit masses

Apart from the BJP's opportunist strategies to accommodate Dalit leadership and agendas into its electoral framework, the RSS itself, through its *shiksha abhiyans* has successfully made inroads into the Dalit masses. This is especially true in the case of cities and towns of Karnataka. One example is the shiksha abhiyan that the RSS is carrying out in 500 slums of Bangalore. This is a project of *Rastrottana sahitya parishat* funded by Infosys and Wipro, the pride of globalized modern India! In this project, the charity trusts of both the companies have financed the Rastrottana parishat to supply its venom-filled Hindu communal booklets free of cost to Dalit students. This is implemented through the pracharaks of the Sangh Parivar in the name of a literacy and educational campaign. There are books about Ambedkar also, in that list. One such book claims that Ambedkar hailed the RSS as the

only place where there is no Untouchability and that he blamed the Muslims for dividing India. The remaining books are about Hindu communal icons and about spreading their communal venom. That this project has not received sufficient opposition from Dalit groups working in the state is itself a testimony to the state of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. Now, apart from the Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe (ST) morchas of the BJP you have many more Sangh Parivar outfits working in slums indoctrinating gullible Dalit minds and also providing space for the Dalit lumpen elements with a conscious strategy of infecting unemployed Dalit youth with Hindu communal venom.

The emergence of Dalit middle class and lumpen section

The emergence of a Dalit middle class and a lumpen section is another important factor responsible for the growth of Hindutva influence over Dalits. In fact, it is these classes within the Dalit community that are vehicles of the Hindutva agenda among Dalit masses. While the left wing of the Dalit middle class in Karnataka spearheaded the radicalization of Dalit politics, the gradual institutionalization of such dissent on the one hand and adoption of brahminical culture by upwardly mobile Dalits (holding Satyanarayana pujas is one such glaring evidence), on the other, slowly provided the required ideological and political legitimacy for Hindutva among Dalit masseses.

Moreover, in the absence of radical Dalit politics, the semi-employed and unemployed Dalit youth, devoid of any democratic political idiom to express their anguish, were slowly channelized into the Hindutva stream by the Sangh Parivar in some pockets. Anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan propaganda came in very handy in this process. The northern districts bordering Maharashtra, like Belgaum, Bagalkot, Hubli are witnessing this development. Even in the southern parts in places like Kolar Gold Fields, Chikkamagalore, and so on, a similar process is under way. It is important here to note that all these places are also where acute economic crises have seriously disturbed and dislocated the lives of Dalit masses. While in the northern districts, the Dalit movement is traditionally weak, in the southern parts, the weakness and opportunist manipulations of Dalit leadership and no effective mobilization of the Dalit masses, who are in deep distress, by

any progressive organization has created a situation which is effectively used by the Sangh Parivar for indoctrination and for creating its foot soldiers. The general decline in progressive politics is certainly a reason for the growing Hindutva influence.

Growing legitimacy for the politics of the Hindu Right

The growing legitimacy for Hindutva politics in the mainstream is also another reason for the acceptability of Hindu communal forces. Their proximity to state power, and their actual control over it are also some other factors responsible for this phenomenon. Even though during the recent general elections the rightist BJP faced a debacle in the rest of the country, in Karnataka they have made great strides geographically and socially. There are strong feelings that in many places the BSP was instrumental for the defeat of the Congress and Janata Dal candidates and consequently for the victory of the BJP candidates. It seems, in Karnataka, the Sangh Parivar might have consolidated their base among the Dalits and OBCs. In the recent General Elections of 2004, Hindu Samajotsavas were organized by the Sangh Parivar in several parts of the state, and a special emphasis was laid on the mobilization of Dalits. One of the main slogans was against Untouchability. There was hardly any resistance by the Dalit youth for wearing banians with inscription of OM or chanting of anti-Muslims slogans, which would have been unimaginable in the 1980s.

Depoliticization and deradicalization of Dalit consciousness

The Ambedkarite consciousness and other ideological influences over Dalits helped radicalization and politicization of the Dalit agenda during the 1980s. But the recent articulations of the Dalit agenda devoid of any substantial content for self-respect and other issues by various Dalit groupings are only helping to diffuse the radical potential it once had and helping to keep the skeletal framework with sufficient elasticity to suit the self-motives and self-interests of Dalit politicians. Even though this is an all-India phenomenon, the devastating impact of such constructions is palpable in the state of Karnataka. The pro-globalization school, the isolationist caste fundamentalist school, the opportunist 'state power is the key school', all survive and thrive under

the banner of Ambedkarism! All of them consciously de-emphasize the need for uncompromising struggle—the struggle against the caste system—the essential component of the Ambedkarite mission. For example, the question of land for which Ambedkar attached utmost importance is totally absent in all the contemporary Dalit political agenda. Personal upliftment has become the catchword, which is conveniently made use of by the Hindutva forces.

It should also be noted that these contemporary developments are not going unchallenged. The regrouping of other political actors with more radical, social and political agendas and non-sectarian organizational strategies with the most needed militant programmes are signs of hope in the state. This year's mobilization of Dalits to save the Bababudangiri shrine, a reply of secular democratic forces in Karnataka to the Sangh Parivar's agenda to saffronize Bababudangiri, is a case in point. In 2003 secular activists found a significant section of Dalit youth falling prey to the Sangh Parivar's propaganda about the shrine. There was even a verbal exchange during the campaign, but at many places it was possible to win them over. This time not only has Dalit participation in the Parivar rally come down, but also more Dalit organizations from all over the state participated in the rally organized by the secular forces. In sum, there is a strong need for the radicalization of Dalit politics, the absence of which is paving the way for the growing influence of Hindutva over Dalits in India. Karnataka being no exception to this, it is completely dependant on the progressive forces in the state, including many non-fundamentalist Dalit organizations, to take up this cause at the earliest.

Note

1. Whether Indian state was a welfare state or not, it did display some concern about people's welfare before the neoliberal paradigm set in by mid-1980s.

15

Gujarat: In Search of Answers

Anand Teltumbde and Subhash Gatade

Introduction

It has been more than two years since February 2002 when Godhra and its aftermath—the genocide in Gujarat orchestrated by the Hindutva brigade with due connivance of the state machinery—took place. In this period, not only has the Sangh Parivar been able to reap benefits of the politics of hate propagated by it and re-instal one of its pracharaks, Narendra Modi, who made himself infamous in rearticulating it with state power, as in charge of the state but also it has been able to communicate its own destructive prowess to the splintered secular opposition in this country in no uncertain terms. This 'successful experiment' (to quote Herr Ashok Singhal) has helped erase the fictitious line which allegedly separated the 'lunatic fringe' and the 'moderate' elements within the Parivar.[1] It also demonstrated a clear 'method in madness', an art which these zealots have perfected over the years through many such experiences. None other than the supremo of the Sangh Parivar, Mr. Sudarshan, had the gumption to claim that 'Muslims in this country will have to "Live at the Mercy of the Hindus".'

A major part of the analysis of the Gujarat genocide and the growing dominance of majoritarian forces in the state has focused itself on the weltanschauung of the Sangh Parivar, its anti-people character; its subversion of democratic institutions and its relationship with the current neoliberal economic policies. Attempts have also been made, not only to comprehend the nature of Fascism in our times but also to discern the various threads which have gone into 'popularizing' the politics of hate peddled by the Hindutva brigade and to understand the

way in which the 'false consciousness' created and driven by communal Fascism could permeate deep into the institutions of state and civil society turning it into the first 'laboratory of Hindu Rashtra' in independent India (see also Essay 2).

Despite this it cannot be said that the whole dynamic of the institutional and ideological incorporation of the various sections of Hindu society ranging from the upper castes to the women and the Dalits, with the history of contradictions among them, into the maelstrom of militant Hindutva has been adequately understood. Neither has the gradual abandonment of secular pretensions by the upper castes been highlighted; nor has the Hindutvization of the Shudra castes (backward castes) represented by the Ghanchi, Narendra Modi, or the Lodh, Uma Bharti, been properly emphasized. There is no adeqate explanation as to why this revivalist project of the upper castes is being upheld by the Shudra castes, and is now being peddled to the tribals and Dalits. It is a stark fact that despite innumerable reports and analyses we seem to be nowhere near a balanced sociological analysis of the Gujarat genocide and its aftermath.

This apparent failure of the intelligentsia, to discern properly various threads of the social fabric to understand this gory chapter in the history of the state, has its genesis in the skewed understanding which dominates even the academia which has, till date, constantly refused to integrate considerations of caste and other identities into its analysis. The Gujarat carnage has come to be characterized by the large-scale participation of tribals and Dalits as the foot soldiers of the Hindutva brigade. Most fact-finding reports and commentaries graphically lamented this unfortunate development but there has hardly been an attempt to understand the reasons behind it; much less the intricate relationship between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces vis-à-vis the Muslims. Rather the quietude that accompanied it seemed to insinuate a certain disdain; and, worse, a tacit confirmation of the societal prejudice that these lowly people could really do anything. It came handy for the caste prejudices of people to make out that such heinous killings cannot be the act of the 'cultured' Brahmins and Banias in the Sangh Parivar. Worse, it inextricably bracketed Dalits with the Hindutva forces, reinforced false consciousness of Dalits as Hindus, and thereby served the vile agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

The communal conflagration in Gujarat has thrown up many issues of vital importance. The issue of Dalit participation is of particular importance; not because it magnifies the menace of communalism but because it decimates potential opposition to it. We seek to problematize this issue. An attempt is made to understand Dalit behaviour during the genocidal experimentation of Hindutva in Gujarat in terms of the peculiar evolution of Dalit identity and consciousness from paternalistic Harijanism and its subsequent transformation under various forces within the context of changes in the economy that befell the state. The absence of social osmosis or psychological support, reflected in the apathetic attitude of society in general towards Dalits, is also noted as the reinforcing factor of this behaviour. It is broadly acknowledged that the 'turnaround' in the fate of the Hindutva project would not have been possible, if a section of Dalits and the tribals had not opted to side with it. Thus it follows that these people constitute a vital point to pivot any resistance to the Hindutva onslaught in future. In view of the importance of this issue, further work needs to be done to deepen the understanding of the issues identified in this essay.

Godhra: An Alibi of an Action for a Planned Reaction

Definitely the crime of the Gujarat carnage lies not so much in physical participation, which doubtlessly is shared by all the castes and classes, but in the cold blooded conceptualizing, planning and leadership in its execution, which has been done entirely by the ringleaders of the Hindutva brigade. Most fact-finding reports highlighted the intricate planning with which this carnage was executed, refuting the contention of the state and the Hindutva brigade that it was a spontaneous reaction to the Godhra killings (the deaths of the Kar Sevaks in the train compartment that was set on fire at Godhra Station). *Mainstream* (16 March 2002) quotes Professor Keshavram Kashiram Shastri, the 96-year-old chairman of the Gujarat unit of the VHP, saying that the list of shops owned by Muslims in Ahmedabad was prepared on the morning of 28 February 2002 itself. The admission thus comes from the horse's mouth that throws light on the details of the preparedness which existed in the Sangh Parivar and proves beyond doubt how the 'spontaneous reaction' to the heinous Godhra killings was engineered by the higher

ups in the Parivar. The enormity of it cannot be determined only by counting the numbers of killings, rape, looting and burning but by the long-term damage it inflicted on the moral fabric of society. The Hindutva brigade has not only violated the penal code or the Constitution but also the civilizational mores of this land. The crime of the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat is unpardonable!

Much is made of the Godhra incident by the Hindutva brigade as the action to which the Gujarat carnage in the Modi'fied Newton's law was said to be a justified reaction. Godhra met with condemnation from all, as it should. However, the fact remains that people still do not know who perpetrated Godhra and who were killed. (Recently the report of Justice U. Banerjee concludes that the fire in the train compartment was an accident, which occurred inside it.) The behaviour of authorities in dealing with crime of such an enormity and sensitivity, the subsequent forensic inferences refuting most versions peddled for this 'action' and the deafening silence observed over it in the area where it happened, thicken the veil of mystery around this unfortunate incident. No one can say for sure, whether Godhra was planned and if so by whom. This being the state of the 'action', the 'reaction' however materialized instantaneously in a manner that may shame even the expert planners. The gangs were organized and scheduled such that they would not attack their neighbourhoods; they were equipped with the printouts of the targets and provided with guides to pinpoint them in the midst of others, resources such as trishuls, LPG cylinders and petrol cans, not to speak of jeeps and vans and the entire logistic support that was expertly managed with the information flows with enviable efficiency never seen before. As it stands exposed by all the fact-finding reports, the state had actively participated in this heinous 'reaction'.

There is no doubt that the Gujarat carnage was not a reaction but an intricately planned and passionately executed project with the definitive objective of consolidating the majority community in order to win political power. This was particularly necessitated because of the successive debacles the BJP faced in the elections all over the country and even in the elections for local self-government in Gujarat. Qualitatively there was nothing new in it as the Sangh Parivar always thrived on the communal polarization of people to win political power without scruples. Still, for its macabre magnitude, it was a new experiment. Its replicability elsewhere also demanded that it be

formulated and executed like an experiment in a laboratory. Gujarat, characterized by the hegemony of Brahman-Bania conservatism, the well-oiled Sangh Parivar-machinery for propaganda, and militant ideology that had made deep inroads, not only into Dalit colonies, but also the tribal hamlets and the relatively longer BJP rule that succeeded in communalizing institutions of state and civil society, became a natural choice as the laboratory. The trail of this crime must extend, therefore, to the spreading of communal venom among the innocent tribals and gullible Dalits by various outfits of the Sangh Parivar. It is one thing to exploit political vaccum among Dalits and tribals and create a political constituency but it is an entirely different matter to convert them to communalism in order to make them the foot soldiers in genocide. The former can be legitimate political work; the latter is an utterly illegitimate criminal act of which the entire Sangh Parivar in Gujarat is guilty.

Hindutva Overtures and Dalits

Under the guise of religio-cultural work, the Sangh Parivar has been working for Hindutva which is essentially a political concept (see also Introduction, Essay 3). The religio-cultural concept of 'Hindu' though inimical to the Dalits and tribals, represented, according to many scholars, a dispersed identity that is located in a multicultural and multi-religious tradition and social organization. In contrast Hindutva pretends to be inclusive of the Dalits and the tribals, by cosmetically voicing its opposition to Untouchability (and not to castes!), and strives for a monolithic culture and, based on it, a monolithic nation and state as well.

The precursor of Hindutva is Hindu Sanghatan, which means consolidation of Hindus. The movement for Hindu Sanghatan started in the mid-nineteenth century just after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, which even in its devastating defeat had presented a glorious unity of the people of India across communities. The British learnt their lesson and strove to encourage communal strife between the two major communities: Hindus and Muslims. One finds its manifestation in the writings like *Anandamath*[2] and the movements of Hindu nationalism in then Bengal.[3] While this is the ostensible reason for germination of the communal movements, what remains unanswered is why Hindu

communalism start as Hindu Sanghatan; whom did they intend to bring together? The answer perhaps is to be found in the fact that the lower castes were still attracted towards Islam and Christianity in significant numbers through the egalitarian mystic of Sufi saints and humanitarian work of the Christian missionaries respectively. The communitarian modes of expression provided by these religions also acted as a cathartic attraction to the labouring lower castes. The bhadralok (literally, 'the gentry', ie, Bengali educated upper castes) knew the importance of these castes as potential foot soldiers in the ensuing bloody battles indicated in *Anandamath*. The bhadralok wanted there castes to get back into the Hindu fold. The predominant mode of this movement was Hindu Melas (fetes) and collective celebrations of festivals that ostensibly countered the attractions on the other side for these castes. Thus we can see lower castes constituting the raison d'être of Hindutva.

The genesis of the current version of Hindutva, that can be informally traced back to Tilak and formally to Savarkar, was also targeted towards these people and was based on the political motive, to create a monolithic and monocultural Hindu rashtra. Admittedly it forms the source of inspiration of the entire Hindutva movement—from Mr. Advani's Rath Yatras to Pravin Togadia's venom spewing speeches to Narendra Modi's bloody 'reaction' in Gujarat. It resorted to building a repertoire of cultural resources with intellectual thuggery. Hindutva has never hidden its fascist fangs since its birth, and has actually showered praises on the likes of Hitler and Mussolini.[4]

As for the Dalits in modern times, true to their upper caste Hindu culture, the Parivar people first ignored them but soon realizing their importance in the context of increasing fragmentation of electoral politics, began their strategic overtures towards them. By then Dalit politics had been past its zenith and was on a fast decline, inducing in masses feelings of frustration and hopelessness and impelling the emerging elite class to seek greener pastures elsewhere. Taking advantage of this situation and the increasing fixation of Dalit masses with the Ambedkar icon, the Sangh Parivar tried to lure the Dalits into their fold, firstly by coopting Ambedkar as one of their *Pratahsmaraniya*[5] and thereafter by launching the cooptation platforms like Samajik Samrasata Manch. These programmes were operated over the last two decades with typical Sanghist perseverance. In the case of tribals, they had noted the political vacuum and soon monopolized the entire space

much earlier than anybody could comprehend. They converted Adivasi tribals into *vanavasis* (forest dwellers), skilfully depriving them of their ownership antecedents and making them uncivilized junglees, Hinduized them through their Vanavasi Ashram schools, replacing their tribal gods with Ganeshas and such others and slowly poisoned them with communal hatred for other religions by organizing various campaigns like the 'trishul campaigns'. It is important to note that this kind of trishul campaign was conducted in Ahmedabad city just a few months before the 'reaction' to Godhra.

While there is much anxiety to note causal aspects for the lamentable transformations of the Dalits as an ally of the Hindutva forces, curiously there is hardly any attempt to see the things from the Dalit viewpoint or interrogate the civil society that allows at first instance such transformations. There is no doubt that the process of transformation of the Dalits into foot soldiers of Hindutva underscores a bitter reality about the civil society that has always refused to take note of their woes. No amount of injustice, humiliations or atrocities on Dalits stirs its conscience. Even in times of crisis they find themselves utterly isolated without any assistance from anyone. Why has even the so-called progressive section of society always kept quiet when Dalits face open oppression from powerful high caste people? Why is there no outcry from civil liberty activists when inhuman atrocities are committed on Dalits and when the state machinery plays the role of an active accomplice? Why are there no fact-finding reports on these incidents? Why do the atrocities on the Dalits not nibble at the conscience of even the progressive analysts? Knowing that they are vulnerable, what proactive steps have these people taken for preventing them from falling prey to allurements of reactionary forces? Why do Dalit affairs have to belong to the Dalits alone? The sufferings and oppressions of the Dalits are as though taken for granted! In the case of communal conflict, the people taking cudgels for the minority community get eulogized as secularists. But in the case of caste conflicts, there is a risk of one being derided as a casteist or condemned as an outright outcaste if one comes forward in support of hapless Dalits. In the caste riots Dalits get beaten by the caste Hindus and in communal riots they get battered as the Hindus. In any situation they carry double the burden of an average citizen but remain unappreciated. Do these attitudes not reflect the age-old caste prejudice against the Dalits—

the accusations any progressive would hate to accept? In any analysis of Dalit behaviour, these and such other questions necessarily demand answers.

The Historical Background

Gujarat represents an amazing degree of coexistence of tradition and modernity. By any available measures, it ranks among the most developed state of the country. With a per capita income of Rs.19,228 in 2000-01, which is much higher than the national per capita income of Rs. 16,487, the state stood at fifth position among the large states in India. It is the second most industrialized state in the country, just behind Maharashtra, a position that it has maintained since the 1980s. At the time of the formation of the state in 1960, it was eighth in terms of industrial development, but with the focused attention on pushing industrial development in competition to Maharashtra, it jumped six ranks and attained second position just within a period of two decades. This feat is particularly attributable to the dominant Mahajan (business class) culture of Gujarat. For centuries Gujaratis have been migrating not only to other states of India but also to other countries with a singular entrepreneurial zeal. It is this Mahajan culture that has led the state to entrepreneurship, cooperatives, industrialization and migration. The Mahajan culture provided a simple principle: *'kajiyanu mon kaluu'*, which means 'conflict is always inauspicious'.[6]

Even during the times of Gandhian turbulence that subverted this principle, the Mahajan milieu remained supreme and hegemonic. Mahatma Gandhi himself represented this milieu in a certain sense in his methods of passive resistance, non-violence and advocacy of class collaboration. When the workers in the rest of the country were revolting against their capitalist masters, the workers in Ahmedabad, a major centre of the textile industry, were displaying exemplary cooperation with their exploiters under Majoor Mahajan Sangh (MMS), the mill workers' trade union started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. This Mahajan milieu got its first rude shock in the 1969 communal riots. The post-independence developmental strategies adopted by the Congress and the policies of protective discrimination led to the growth of intermediate castes, sections of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (OBCs). This was resented by the traditional elites belonging

to the upper castes. This resentment burst out in the form of Navnirman agitation (the movement for restructuring) by students against the new emerging sections of the middle class in Gujarat.[7]

In response to this upper caste student agitation, the Congress came up with its famed strategy of KHAM (acronym for Kshatriya, Harijan, Ahirs and Muslim, representing the winning combination of these populous communities in the state for electoral success) The KHAM strategy totally marginalized the political aspirations of the Brahmin-Bania-Patidar trio, the traditional ruling classes in the state, by the late 1970s. With this strategy, the Congress (I) leadership had succeeded in dislodging them from all core party positions between 1976 and 1980, so much so that there was not a single Patidar minister of cabinet rank when the Congress (I) formed the government in 1980 after sweeping the polls. This power hungry upper caste trio needed to do something to regain its lost grounds. The reservation issue, which always carried potential to galvanize the entire non-Dalit Hindu (caste Hindu) population against it, was grabbed to spark off statewide caste riots in the guise of an anti-reservation agitation in 1981.[8]

These riots were far wider in spread than even the latest genocide of the Muslims in February 2002; the Dalits having been battered in the then 18 of Gujarat's 19 districts. Dalits faced the wrath of the same Brahmin-Bania-Patidar trio again in 1985, although this time their agitation was against the hike in job quotas for the OBCs in government and educational institutions. Ironically the Dalits upheld these reservations for the OBCs under the Mandal Commission but were beaten by the OBCs at the behest of the upper castes. Soon, however, the upper caste trio realized the folly of its strategy in electoral terms, the anti-reservation stance could possibly antagonize 75 percent of the population of the SCs, STs and OBCs, and started wooing the Dalits into the Hindu fold. While realizing the increasing unreliability of the traditional vote banks, the Congress had begun to woo the Hindu majority after the second coming of Indira Gandhi by openly communalizing the Kashmir and Punjab problems and, on its part, the BJP smartly jumped in to consolidate the entire Hindu mass on the basis of Hindutva, counterpoising it against the religious minorities. Rajiv Gandhi's political naiveté provided them a real boost by throwing up issues like Shah Bano and Ram Janambhumi and launching the New Economic Policy in 1985, the reversal of the so called 'socialist'

stance of economic development that unleashed new set of crises on people. If Jayaprakash Narayan's total revolution had helped them (BJP) rise from political irrelevance to the national mainstream, it was Rajiv Gandhi's reign that catalyzed their emergence as an alternate political force. The aspiration of gaining political power, in the context of their image, however, could only be realized if they could maximize their share of the majority community and hence they began to actively attract Dalits towards them. The manifestation of this change was seen in Gujarat, in terms of the Dalit and OBC participation in the riots against Muslims in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra and thereafter in Advani's rath yatra.

Dalits in Gujarat

Historically, Gujarati Dalits never developed 'Dalit' consciousness in a manner that characterized the Ambedkarian movement in neighbouring Maharashtra. While in Maharashtra and elsewhere assertive Dalit movements had sprouted and were growing in the congenial political climate, the Gujarati Dalits remained under the paternalistic influence of Mahatma Gandhi as his Harijans, as a part of the Hindu community. Even after independence, save for certain pockets, this hegemony of the upper castes over the Dalit universe remained unaffected. In the wake of the countrywide turbulence during the late 1960s, and the rise of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra, the educated Dalit youth in Gujarat came out of this influence. The Dalit Panther movement in 1970s, however, remained confined to urban areas. For the first time, the statewide 1981 riots awakened the Dalits to the ground reality and impelled them towards the Ambedkarian Dalit identity. The statewide celebrations of the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar that followed these riots marked this sudden change of consciousness. Many Ambedkarite activists had striven before to create this Dalit consciousness in them through the Dalit Panthers, various Buddhist organizations, BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Communities' Employees Federation), the DS4 (Dalit Samaj Shoshit Sangharsh Samiti), the BSP, and so on, but their influence remained at best confined to certain pockets. The violence of 1981 riots achieved in one shot what they could not do over many years. The backlash was

so harsh and widespread that it marked a watershed in the Dalit consciousness.

It is significant to remember that during these riots the Muslims had sheltered Dalits at many places. The Dalits faced the wrath of the same Brahmin-Bania-Patidar combine again in 1985. Yet just within one year, in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra, the Dalits were found enthusiastically supporting the BJP. When riots broke out all over Gujarat in 1990 during L. K. Advani's rath yatra, spearheaded in Gujarat by none other than Narendra Modi, the then general secretary of the state BJP, Dalits and middle class Hindus were clearly set against the Muslims. The BJP strategy of winning over Dalits, thereby consolidating broad sections of Hindus and polarizing the population along communal lines bore fruits at least in Gujarat. It is said that these riots began the spatial segregation of Muslims in all the three areas: the old walled city, the industrial mill areas and the new middle class and elite town. The subsequent riots that broke out after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 ghettoized the city further. Muslims increasingly shifted to the Muslim majority area for safety and Hindus went to Hindu areas. While this happened in case of the middle classes, the poor people from both the sides could not shift their abodes and continued to live next to each other.

The 'Dalit' consciousness created by the 1981 caste riots could not last long in the absence of any organized Dalit movement. On the contrary, the riots the Dalits suffered immediately next year sped up its decline. Therefore when the upper caste Hindutva forces extended the hand of friendship to them, they appear to have been more than inclined to grab it. It was backed by existential considerations: friendship with the Hindutva forces would spare them beatings and might bring in certain material benefits through Sanskritization that all the low castes including Dalits without Ambedkarian consciousness are supposed to possess. The process of Sanskritization elaborated by the famous sociologist M. N. Srinivas,[9] does explain the Dalits penchant for becoming a 'Hindu'. A Dalit broadly has two options: he or she can either reject or renounce the whole edifice of religion which sanctifies the caste system and strive for an alternate identity as Ambedkarite Dalits did or they can strive to climb, at least notionally, the social hierarchy by imitating the way of life and ritual of the dominant castes.

In Gujarat, looking at its peculiar trajectory and the overall dominance of conservative forces in the political as well as social-cultural spheres, it becomes clear that the possibility of revolt or rebellion against the brahminical system in order to strive for an alternate identity was already foreclosed for the Dalits and the other oppressed sections. The only other option of Sanskritization therefore appears available for the Gujarati Dalits, which they accepted and became the Hindutva ally.

Hindutva thrives in Economic Crises

While during the first two decades after the formation of the state the pace of economic development was spectacular, it engendered regional disparity, which instead of getting bridged got further aggravated with the developmental approach followed thereafter. Moreover, as Darshini Mahadevia observes, post-1980s industrial development in the state remained extremely capital intensive [10] and hence not many jobs were created in the state. The much touted large volume of investments took place in only few large industries and in a small belt. Hence, as far as the common people are concerned, this economic growth had little consequence. It could not touch their lives and, as a result, the majority remain engrossed in their old social practices and ways of life. The nature of economic growth in the state generated many dichotomies: the dichotomy in industrial development between capital intensive and other industries, the former getting all the priority treatment during the globalization era after 1990s; the dichotomy between the development corridor, where most of industrial development has been concentrated, versus the rest of the state, and so on.

The State Domestic Product (SDP) of Gujarat showed commendable growth pattern until the mid-1990s but it suddenly fell and hovered around zero around the turn of the century. Table 15.1 presents these data on SDP for the years from 1993-94 to 2001-02, where the growth rate was much higher during 1994-1997, but went into a decline from 1998-2001. Interestingly, this period coincides with the period of Narendra Modi's government. Even the data on the per capita SDP provided in Table 15.2 presents a similar picture of a former high rate during 1994 to 1997, and a much lower rate thereafter with a wide fluctuation of –4.0 in 1999-2000 and an increase of 9 percent in 2001-2002. Besides this erosion in people's income, the drastic decline in the

share of agriculture in the economy as seen from the data on sectoral contribution in Table 15.3 reveal a grim picture of falling living standards of the people.

Table 15.1. Net State Domestic Product (Rs. in crore)

Sr. No.	Year	Current Prices	Constant Prices	Percent growth over previous year	
				Current prices	Constant Prices
1	1993-94	49194	49194	-	-
2	1994-95	63516	58058	29.1	18.0
3	1995-96	71886	61246	13.2	5.5
4	1996-97	85837	69966	19.4	14.2
5	1997-98	91188	71442	6.2	2.1
6	1998-99	105305	76571	15.5	7.2
7	1999-00 (P)	107618	75616	2.2	-1.2
8	2000-01 (P)	110449	76102	2.6	0.6
9	2001-02 (Q)	124905	83537	13.1	9.8

Table 15.2. Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (Rs.)

Sr. No.	Year	Current Prices	Constant Prices	Percent growth over previous year	
				Current prices	Constant Prices
1	1993-94	9796	9796	-	-
2	1994-95	12640	11535	29.0	17.8
3	1995-96	13665	11649	8.1	1.0
4	1996-97	16153	13206	18.2	13.4
5	1997-98	16585	13018	2.7	-1.4
6	1998-99	19001	13735	14.6	5.5
7	1999-00 (P)	18926	13187	-0.4	-4.0
8	2000-01 (P)	18922	12934	0.0	-1.9
9	2001-02 (Q)	21276	14102	12.4	9.0

Source: *Socio-Economic Review, Gujarat State, 2002-03*
http://www.gujaratindia.com/useful_Info/Socio%20Economic%20Review/ser03/serp2-2.pdf

The magnitude of the economic decline can be realized from the growth figures for the first half of the 1990s to the later half of the 1990s; the growth rate had actually fallen from 12 percent to just 2.3 percent in real terms causing corresponding decline in the living standards of the population. The general economic dilapidation in Gujarat came handy for the BJP to lure away the crisis-ridden masses to its obscurantist projects by systematically constructing an identity of the Other. With no regular source of income and without any regular job, as Jan Breman observed, many could not even escape the wave of lumpenization which augured well for any kind of rioting.[11]

Table 15.3 Gross State Domestic Product by Broad Sectors: Sectoral Contributions (in Per cent)

Sr. no.	Industry	At current prices			At 1993-94 prices	
		1993-94	1999-00	2000-01	1999-00	2000-01
1.	Primary	25.4	18.6	16.0	18.0	15.9
1.1	Agriculture	19.9	14.7	12.4	14.1	11.9
2.	Secondary	35.8	39.2	41.0	40.4	41.5
2.1	Manufacturing	28.3	32.8	33.8	33.3	34.3
3.	Tertiary	38.8	42.2	43.0	41.6	42.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Socio-Economic Review, Gujarat State, 2002-03 available at* http://www.gujaratindia.com/Useful-Info/Socio%20Economic%20Review/socio02/sdp.pdf

Dalits being the lowest on the socioeconomic scale were naturally the most affected lot. The closure of over 50 textile mills in Ahmedabad and the devastation of other small scale units under the onslaught of globalization directly hit the Dalits. As Bremen writes,

> And, in this still ongoing crisis, at least one lakh workers have lost their jobs. While around the middle of the twentieth century half of the city's workforce used to earn its livelihood from employment in the composite textile enterprises dominating the industrial landscape, this percentage has now dwindled to a tiny fraction. [12]

> The closure of the textile mills has been accompanied by the 'dramatic . . . collapse of the social infrastructure that has accompanied it. It is certainly not a coincidence that the orgy of violence that has taken place in Ahmedabad since the end of February 2002 seems to have reached its climax in ex-mill localities populated by the social segments from which a major part of this industrial workforce used to be recruited: subaltern Hindus (mainly Dalits, OBCs and intermediate classes . . .) and Muslims. [13]

It may be easily argued that similar impoverishment of masses has taken place during this period even in other states; far more calamitous social changes had occurred in Bengal, both before and after partition, but one does not see them resulting into gory communal conflicts as they happened in Gujarat. The answer to this enigma lies in understanding that social phenomena do not necessarily have a definitive causal relation with a set of factors even when they reflect strong correlations. They need certain catalytic factors to produce those phenomena. Socio-cultural patterns, hegemonic ideology, presence of certain individuals, and so on, constitute such catalytic factors which distinguish Gujarat from other states.

Generally the Dalits who constituted unskilled or low skilled labour in factories could be easily displaced by new automating technology and social prejudices made them further vulnerable to losses of jobs. Their struggle for survival impelled them to take up some casual work that was traditionally being done by the Muslims. Thus began a sort of economic competition and clash of interest between the Dalits and the Muslims. Wherever the Dalit-Muslim clashes have occurred in Ahmedabad, this economic contradiction can be underscored easily in the change of occupational pattern that came during the last two decades.[14] Jan Bremen attributes it to globalization and the manner in which capitalism has grown in the state. The informalization of Ahmedabad's workforce following the closure of its textile mills resulted in the pauperization of the workers. Sections among these marginalized workers, mainly Dalits, are part of the Sangh Parivar's lumpen elements.[15]

Indeed, the impact of globalization should not be conceived in narrow terms as entailing mere job losses. The growth-centric economic

development that globalization promotes invariably marginalizes people-issues, as has happened in Gujarat. The economic boom in the early 1990s created alongside great disparities; while the industrialists, traders and educated middle castes benefited with this boom, the farmers who had enjoyed tremendous prosperity during the green revolution years until the previous decades saw stagnation in their income, the lower classes anyway left out of the distribution net. When this boom receded, resulting in the decline in the living standards of the population as indicated by the actual decline in per capita income after 1996-97, it created fertile grounds for communal identities to flourish. Few realize that globalization with its ideological thrust on the autonomy of an individual and free market that provides unfettered space for these autonomous individuals to compete is intrinsically supportive of Social Darwinism, which manifests into fundamentalism, communalism and Fascism. It is not only in India, where the growth of the Hindutva forces can be directly correlated with the advance of globalization, but also all over the world that fundamentalism of some kind is seen on the rise. The atomized individual is basically an insecure creature in the market place, having lost the protective cover of the organizations like trade unions, and so on, readily accepted community in Hindutva when offered by the Sangh Parivar. Dalits also could not be an exception to this process.[16]

Other Factors in Dalit Participation

The specificity of the historical backdrop and the economic crisis engendered by growth-centric economic development strategies coupled with the presence of an unscrupulous dispensation governing the state largely provides a broad framework to understand this gruesome carnage and Dalit participation on the side of the perpetrators. Many commentators have delineated additional factors that according to them have caused this sorry phenomenon. Some have noted that the Dalits were lured with money, liquor and political prospects and were used like terrorists by the Hindutva forces.[17] While this aspect cannot be denied in any mass mobilization, as for instance in any elections, it is improbable that these material incentives alone can impel masses into ferocious marauding and mass killing. These factors can certainly supplement the existing sociological make up but

cannot be the cause of it. Similar things are said even for tribals that the Sangh Parivar provided them money and liquor to incite them to riot. But to consider that money and liquor alone have impelled tribals to commit inhuman acts will amount to ignoring the long-standing indoctrination that the Sangh Parivar has been doing in the tribal belts for many decades. As this systematic ideological indoctrination of tribals is the root cause for tribal participation, the psycho-sociological make up of Dalits over a period preceding the carnage should be identified as the root cause for their participation.[18]

An altogether different type of reaction to the entire gory episode is provided by Kancha Illaiah, a Dalit-Bahujan scholar. While acknowledging that a gap does exists between the Dalits and Muslims in many parts of the state he indirectly blames the Muslim elite for this state of affairs and asks them to make special efforts to bridge the gap. In his article 'Dalit, OBC and Muslim relations'[19] (see Essay 2) he has put forward this position in no uncertain terms. According to him, 'The Muslim intelligentsia failed to establish a rapport with the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs at the ground level.' He adds,

> The Muslim intelligentsia must also be held responsible for showing indifference to the issues of caste and untouchability . . . In the case of Islam there is not only no investigative tradition, there is no social service tradition with a sense of social interaction before someone embraces Islam. Muslim intellectuals must learn from Christian missionaries and work among Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs so that a relationship of trust is established. All oppressed must learn to work for each other's liberation and build social bondages among them. That is the best way to prevent another Gujarat.

The absence of a relationship of trust between the Dalits and Muslims, as noted by Kancha Ilaiah, may appear plausible but then what relationship of trust could be assumed between the Dalits and high caste Hindus that drive their Hindutva agenda? The fact remains that the people who participated on both sides historically had a relationship but owing to growing economic crises coupled with the machinations of vested interests, they were impelled to play an internecine game for the benefit of the communal forces.

Breman provides a richer explanation to the breakdown of the cohesive relationship transcending religions and castes through the Gandhian institution of Majoor Mahajan Sangh. He notes the catalytic role played by MMS in bringing about working class solidarity in past decades, albeit under a paternalistic shadow of the mill owners, when it had the unquestioned support of Hindu and Muslim workers alike. The MMS promoted a number of welfare practices that created meeting points within the mill localities 'which facilitated interaction between people of different identities' at 'sports clubs, reading rooms, classes for adult education . . . day nurseries, primary health centres'. Thus—and it is of central importance—'The "other" was not at a distance but highly visible and touchable as a workmate, a neighbour or a friend with whom close contact was maintained both within and outside the mill. This mesh of social cohesion that transcended the separate niches of caste and religion broke down once the MMS started to fade away.'[20]

A valuable insight is offered into the process of Dalit activists crossing over to the BJP by P. K. Valera, a former bureaucrat and Dalit activist in Gujarat. He explains, 'In the Congress, the hierarchy is so rigid that it is difficult to make it to the top in a few years. As against this, in the BJP the journey to the top is rather quick. The party has given some carrots to the Dalit leaders by including them as their lower- and middle-level cadre.'[21] As opposed to Congress, the Sangh Parivar with a plethora of organizations provides vast employment opportunity. For a typical educated but frustrated Dalit youth, the politics of Hindutva provides some kind of political identity and a strange sense of camaraderie.[22] He sees it as political recognition, even if the benefits may be paltry; it proves an ideal bet. Therefore, when there was a churning in the various strata of oppressed sections, the absence of a strong democratic movement coupled with the near total absence of a transformatory social cultural movement facilitated the communal forces in making inroads in the Dalit- tribal psyches. This political carrot associated with the BJP certainly explains many ambitious Dalit activists jumping onto the BJP bandwagon. The relative vacuum in the BJP for the non-upper caste people has indeed been an attractive force for the opportunist elements from the communities like Dalits and Muslims. This trend can be discerned all over the country, though it is expectedly more pronounced in Gujarat on account of the weak ideological anchors to Gujarati Dalits. Many young Dalit

leaders like state social welfare minister Fakirbhai Vaghela have made a good political fortune in a short time.[23]

Some Vital Issues

While it became known to all that the tribals and Dalits have played as foot soldiers of the Hindutva brigade in Gujarat, there have been many instances of Dalits providing protection to Muslims. As in earlier times, many Dalits had rushed out to protect Muslims but like one Anand Parmar, a 60-year-old activist, who tried to dissuade a Dalit mob from rioting in Ahmedabad, received violence in return from the Hindutva goons and thus were thwarted in the process.[24] Similarly, it is equally true that people of all castes and classes took part in the looting of the Muslim shops and property according to their class interests. While the ordinary people looted the necessities, the elites plundered the shops with fashion goods and designer wares. Unlike earlier riots where there is a risk of life in indulging in looting, and therefore only the poor and desperate people could venture out, there was no such risk involved in the state-backed carnage in Gujarat. It thus emboldened even the upper caste women to venture out and loot the Muslim shops in their locations. While the tribal crowds looting the shops and houses belonging to Muslims was eloquently written on and showed on the television, there was no such media celebration when the high caste gentlemen and ladies from well-to-do homes looted the high quality Muslim stores in the posh localities of Ahmedabad in broad daylight. The Gujarat carnage has thus also exposed the caste-class bias of our institutions.

The sighs of lament over Dalit participation in the Muslim carnage drowned the facts about the losses the Dalits themselves suffered during these gory times. It is now clear that the massacre of Muslims that took place in Gujarat with state connivance, as all fact-finding reports highlight, had also a little Dalit blood accompanying it. The Dalits lost 108 lives in Gujarat; 38 alone in the city of Ahmedabad, which is a significant percentage of the official death toll of Muslims. The heart rending devastations that visited Muslims during this macabre campaign of the communalists was also shared by the Dalits albeit in a smaller quantity. The experience of agony; the tears and tribulations; the pangs of pain that overwhelmed the Muslims also besieged the Dalit

community too. Even the camps for victims from both the communities resounded with the similarity of their pathetic condition. Despite the seemingly 'connected' people frequenting these 'Hindu' camps, their condition was not a shade better than the Muslim camps that were run by the community volunteers. The condition of Dalits in these camps thus clearly mirrored the material reality that Dalits, irrespective of what label they are given, cannot be the part of the Hindutva privileges. Whatever their contradictions with their Muslim neighborhood they could not really escape their predicament. The Gujarat violence clearly highlighted the truth that communities do not make much difference in people's suffering; their classes do.[25]

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The question of Dalits performing as foot soldiers of Hindutva is simplistically explained by the 'Harijan' consciousness or the low level of 'Ambedkarian' consciousness of Gujarati Dalits, implying thereby that such phenomenon will not be possible elsewhere. However, the extent of the ripples caused by the utterly mischievous slogan of 'Bhimshakti+Shivshakti = Deshbhakti', given by the working president of the Shiv Sena, the sworn enemy of Ambedkarite Dalits, created in Maharashtra, the centre of Ambedkarism, has shaken the confidence of analysts (see also Essay 10). It broadly reveals the declining state of 'Dalit' consciousness everywhere which can be attributable to the absence of a Dalit movement. The antidote against this Dalit degeneration can thus only be a strong Dalit movement based on the real issues of Dalits. In view of the inherently divisive tendency of the caste system, such a Dalit movement would do well to shun the caste idiom and pursue a class line in the true Ambedkarian spirit of the annihilation of castes.

It is a tactical need of Hindutva that the Dalits are included in its 'us' against the Other—the Muslims and the Christians. However, it is inconceivable that the contradictions between the Dalits and the upper caste/class Hindus that constitute the core of Hindutva can be glossed over merely through the emotional slogans of Hindu unity. The need of polarization into the 'us' and 'they' is prompted by the process of gaining political power within the prevailing political framework. Once, this objective is accomplished, the agenda would certainly shift to

enforcing hierarchical social structure, not quite strictly one hopes as based on birth as ordained in the varnashram dharma, but which is externally based on secular considerations while it internally corresponds to the age-old caste lines. For example, the simple dictum that is passed in the name of globalization that only the select few should have access to higher education, as the Ambani-Birla framework for the reforms in education proposed, will effectively exclude all the Dalits from the realm of higher education and ensure confirmation to Manu's dictum without actually prescribing to it.

With increasing revivalist fervor, the contradictions between the Dalits and the non-Dalits are bound to increase. The atrocities are but the manifestation of these contradictions, the recent statistics expectedly shows galloping rise in all types of atrocities on the Dalits during the decade of 1990s that could be identified with the rising onslaught of Hindutva as compared to those during the previous decade (see Essay 1, n2).[26]

The interrelationship and the interlinkages between Hindutva and the neoliberal economic policies peddled under imperialist globalization need also to be unearthed. In fact, neoliberalism that provides the ideological basis for imperialist globalization has given rise to fundamentalist and fascist forces, the world over, through atomization of the individual and autonomizing his/her enterprise in the 'market' sans any moral precepts. Globalization makes borders fluid thereby rendering individuals utterly insecure. Because the market place is internationalized, they are more vulnerable to policies made elsewhere which couldn't care less if local cultures disappeared, which also creates atavistic reactions. Globalization policies of curbing public expenditure, privatization and marketization of everything has been directly responsible for galloping unemployment and consequent lumpenization of youth that produce and reproduce Modis and Zadaphias. It is not incidental that the rise of Hindutva (even including the Congress variety followed after the second coming of Indira Gandhi through Narasimha Rao) has been closely correlated to the policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The BJP which started with a two-MP strength in the Parliament in 1984 gets catapulted to power with 182 MPs in 1999 precisely during this period. Globalization provides the raison d'être for the Hindutva project that cannot possibly survive in its aggressive form without the former. Therefore

the resistance to Hindutva must necessarily target the forces of globalization also as its enemy.

Lastly, it needs to be understood that Hindutva is the fascist ideology of the ruling class and therefore it is futile to expect any alternative out of mainstream politics. Fascism always uses the prevailing parliamentary democratic framework to secure power and, once it is done, scraps it. Even during its use, Fascism does not follow the parliamentary democratic norms to mobilize votes. It relies on fighting on the street to create mass frenzy. Rath Yatras, Mandir movement and communal riots are but examples of it. Bereft of this ideological weaponry, conventional parliamentary parties can never match the aggressive strategies of Fascism. Rather they get dragged along its trail. Therefore, the effective counter to Fascism can never be articulated through conventional parliamentary medium. The mass movement against Fascism has to proactively oppose Fascism on street. These street battles may orient and shape up parliamentary processes but the latter cannot be relied as the primary counter. Even the happy results in the last general elections in which (contrary to elitist predictions) ordinary people silently rejected the BJP, the parliamentary face of the fascist forces, would not invalidate this inference. Parliamentary process offers respite when it is allowed to operate, but what if it is not, which is what Fascism eventually does.

Notes

1. Conventional language seems to fail to convey proper meaning in the case of the Sangh Parivar. Ordinarily, Mr. Atal Behari Bajpai represents a moderate element in the Sangh Parivar. But when one recalls his defence of raking up Ram Mandir issue for communal polarization saying, 'because they started Mandal, we started Kamandal' (cited Jamanadas, K. *Safronozation,Hinduization or Brahminization,* http://www.ambedkar.org/jamanadas/Hinduization.htm) or saying if Godhra happens again, Gujarat also would be repeated, one gets baffled as to what 'moderate' means.
2. One of the earliest communal texts that may be identified as the product of this colonial engineering was the celebrated novel *Anandmath* written in Bengali by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya who happened to be the first Indian to be directly appointed to the post of Deputy Magistrate in

1858 by the then British Lt. Governor of Bengal immediately in the aftermath of 1857. His *Anandmath* is a pro-British and anti-Muslim text. See Islam, Shamsul, Why Does Hindutva Hate Muslims and Christians so Violently? http://www.insaf.net/central/insaf-old/sa2.html, accessed May 30, 2004.

3. See R. C. Majumdar, *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom* Bombay Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: 1961, p. 14.
4. Marzia Cassolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence', 18 April 2004. Also, Shamsul Islam, Marketing Fascism As Hindutva, http://www.secularindia.com/44new.htm also available at http://indianterrorism.bravepages.com/fascism %20 as%20hindutva.htm; accessed April 18, 2004; Also 'Hindutva's Fascist Heritage' Document, *Communalism Combat*, March 2000, http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/mar00/document.htm.)
5. The RSS activists equate Phule and Ambedkar's ideas with the Renaissance in Hindu religion, which they claim was brought about by people like Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo, and so on. The RSS claims that Ambedkar was a 'Reformer of Hindu religion'. As a matter of fact, Ramesh Patange, in his 'Dr. Hedgewar aani Dr. Ambedkar' gives an editorial in *'Bahishkrut Bharat',* 21 Dec 1928 as a whole appendix. In that editorial Dr. Ambedkar had narrated the ill effects of the caste system and observed that if you have to avoid the destruction of Hindu religion, you must get rid of the caste system. http://www.ambedkar.org, Saffronization, Hinduization or Brahminization, Dr. K. Jamanadas,
6. Generally it would mean that Gujarati culture is non-violent. Indeed it is the general impression about Gandhi's Gujarat. However, the facts are quite contrary. While the Mahajan culture prefers peace from the business viewpoint, its other facet reveals how violent it is even within its homestead. For instance, the 2001 Census reveals that the latest sex ratio in urban Gujarat is 879 females per 1000 males, the lowest figure in the last hundred years. It is evident that in the private sphere, violence is visible within one's own family in the form of foeticide and infanticide. If one considers the sex ratio in the population category of 0-6 years here too the state of Gujarat has fared badly as this ratio has decreased from 928 in 1991 to 878 in 2001. Also, see Rakesh Gupta, 'Gujarat Pogrom and Issues at Stake' http://asianaffairs.com/june2002/gujrat_pogrom.htm.
7. See Fernando Franco, Jyotsna Macwan and Suguna Ramanathan, *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit Narratives* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004).
8. Anand Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat', countercurrents.org, http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-

gujarat.htm, accessed 5 April 2004.

9. M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: California: University of California Press, 1966).
10. Some of the examples of direct employment generation by highly capital-intensive new industries of the state can be cited: In RIL (Reliance Industries Ltd.) located at Hazira Industrial Area (HIA) Rs. 3.6 crores of investment was to generate one job. In the same industrial area, in Essar Gujarat, Rs. 2.1 crores was to generate 1 job. In the IPCL plant at Dahej, an investment of Rs. 2.26 crores, in GACL (Dahej) Rs. 2.18 crores and Modern Petrochemicals (Vagra taluka) Rs. 1.77 crores were to generate one direct job. Adani chemicals in Mundra, Kachchh has an investment of Rs. 4.48 crores per employment. See Darshini Mahadevia, 'Gujarat Development Experience and Success of Hindutva.' In *Lessons from Gujarat*, edited by Sandeep Pendse. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2003, pp. 55-73.
11. Jan Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism', *EPW* (20 April 2002), available at http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.html (accessed on 18 April 2004.)
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits'.
15. Dionne Bunsha, 'The Modi Road Show', *Frontline,* 19, 21 (12-25 Oct 2002);(http://www.flonnet.com/fl1921/stories/20021025006900900.htm)
16. Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits'.
17. Davindra Kumar cites Achyut Yagnik, political scientist and coordinator of the Ahmedabad-based Centre for Social Knowledge and Action:

'The Sangh has systematically made inroads among Dalits and tribals and is using them as instruments of Hindutva. This is being achieved with extended government patronage. A systematic Hindutva campaign is on in the tribal region. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal have registered their presence at the village level.' He also cites one social activist (not identified by him) as saying, 'Money (Rs 300 to Rs 500), liquor and promises of power (insignificant positions in RSS, VHP or Bajrang Dal shakhas) were used to lure Dalit youths.' He also cites Udit Raj, who initiated a campaign of mass mobilization of Dalits and Muslims together with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind in the state in the aftermath of riots, points out: 'Dalits were being lured by money, liquor and political prospects and were used like jehadis by the Hindutva forces.' He further writes, 'Once coopted, the Dalit recruits became the new foot soldiers. And they were assured of full state protection and legal assistance

should cases be filed against them.' The VHP has reportedly signed on a battery of 100 lawyers to fight all post-Godhra riot-related cases. (Davinder Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge: The Sangh Exploits Dalit and Tribal Frustration to Recruit Soldiers for Hindutva's 'War', *Outlook,* 24 June 2002, at url: http://cac.ektaonline.org/updates/2002_06_23_archive.htm.

18. While the lure of money is significant, the polarization of tribals and Dalits was a plan set into motion by the Sangh well over a decade ago. It has been active for long in the tribal belts through sister organizations like the Vanavasi Seva Sangh. These outfits seem to have succeeded in indoctrinating the tribals with the view that they are indeed Hindus and that Muslims are their enemies. Says Achyut Yagnik, 'The Sangh has systematically made inroads among Dalits and tribals and is using them as instruments of Hindutva. This is being achieved with extended government patronage. A systematic Hindutva campaign is on in the tribal region. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal have registered their presence at the village level.'
19. Kancha Ilaiah, 'Dalit, OBC and Muslim relations', *The Hindu*, 29 May 2002; also *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004).
20. Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism'.
21. Kumar, Davinder 'Poisoned Edge'. http://cac.ektaonline.org/updates/2002_06_23_archive.htm (last accessed on April 18, 2004.)
22. Sophia Khan, an activist of the Vikas Adhyayan Kendra in Ahmedabad says, "For an unemployed, frustrated Dailt youth, being a member of a political outfit, and one which is in power, is some kind of political identity. He sees it as political recognition, even if the benefits may be paltry.' In Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge.'
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits'.
26. Ibid.

16

The Sangh Parivar's Initiatives in the Tribal Belt of Wyanad in Kerala

T. K. Ramachandran and P. T. John

The degree of success achieved by the fascist project to enlist the Dalits and adivasis as the foot soldiers in the Gujarat genocide has given them the courage to try the same tactics in the tribals belt of Wyanad where they had but marginal influence in the past. The initial phase of the operation climaxed with a Vanavasi conclave at Valliyurkkavu temple attended by none less than the sarsanghachalak, of the RSS, Sudarshan. The choice of the venue was both ironic and significant. Ironic because Valliyurkkavu has the dubious distinction of having been once a major slave market where the upper caste landlords literally bought the hapless adivasis into bondage in the feudal era. The faith in the deity that the illiterate adivasis had was cleverly employed by the overlords to make them accept supinely the rigours of slavery. That the descendants of the hated feudal oppressors could organize such a fairly well-attended meeting is a pointer to the extent retrogressive political positions are becoming popular even in Kerala, which had been famed as the proud bastion of progressive thought and secular mores. It was also significant in that it revealed in graphic detail the diabolic communal project that the Sangh Parivar is trying to foist upon the unsuspecting masses of Wyanad. The organizational and ideological aspects of this initiative require in-depth study and analysis. The following is intended only as an introductory study.

Sanskritization of the Tribals

A key feature of the fascist project in contemporary India is the construction of a pan-Hindu identity both as a vote bank and as a captive recruiting ground for the saffron brigade. It goes without saying that this project is fraught with internal contradictions given the die-hard brahminical bias of the lynchpin outfit within the Sangh Parivar, namely, the RSS, the Dalits and the adivasis, who have suffered inhuman oppression and brutalization under the varna system, are bound to be wary of the new identity proffered to them by the votaries of Hindutva however attractive its packaging may be. But the lessons of the Gujarat carnage perforce make it imperative for us to keep clear of facile optimism and complacency. It is important to remember that Gujarat was a major theatre of the anti-Mandal agitation and this did not prevent at least some sections of the Dalits and tribals from falling under the influence of the vicious and virulent anti-minority campaign unleashed by the fascists. What is even more disquieting is the fact that most of the tactics employed in the hate campaign had been honed in the days of the anti-Mandal agitation and had been tried on the lower castes who were the targets of upper caste fury.

The adivasi population of Wyanad is composed of four major subcastes: Kurichiyas, Kurumas, Paniyas, and Adiyas and is stratified in terms of both economic means and social status. At the top we have the landowning sections, Kurichiyas and Kurumas, and at the bottom we have the landless Adiyas and Paniyas. Well upto the 1990s, like in most other parts of Kerala, the Sangh Parivar had little in terms of a mass base, though the RSS had a well-oiled, state-wide, organizational set up. (Presently it is estimated that Kerala is second only to Uttar Pradesh in terms of the number of Shakhas.) Among the adivasis of Wyanad their influence had been confined to certain individuals and some stray pockets. And even this was limited to the comparatively affluent upper stratum of the Kurichiyas and Kurumas. The populace consisting of the Adiyas, Paniyas and others was totally outside their pale of influence.

However, in the 1990s, utilizing to the hilt their newly won governmental clout and the enormous money power derived therefrom, the Sangh Parivar has put into operation a number of schemes to woo

the tribals of Wyanad. The careful planning and meticulous execution that has gone into these initiatives is an object lesson for secular and democratic forces whose efforts to combat the fascists are still mostly confined to scholarly symposia and occasional shows of strength through bandhs and dharnas. What is significant about the strategies employed by the fascists in the post-Babri Masjid demolition phase is that its focus is no longer the political sphere but the more inchoate realm of the 'civil society'. It is the everyday life of the masses that they are trying to manipulate and aggrandize. Symbols, myths, rituals, religious observances, temple festivals are all being subtly used by them to further the communal agenda. This graphic route to Fascism whereby the entire range of discourses in society comes to be controlled by the saffron brigade requires serious consideration. The journals, the newspapers, the visual media and the multifarious institutions in the public sphere have all been infiltrated by their cadre so thoroughly that their apparent lack of strength in electoral terms is really deceptive. Over the years the fascists have put together a number of front organizations ranging from *balagokulams* to temple protection committees, and medical missions to meditation centres, where its evil ideology is smouldering unperceived even by the most discerning eye. The entire gamut of practices within the public sphere from school textbooks to food habits, from theatre to the Kumbh Mela, are impinged upon by diktat of the fascist ideologues.

The manner in which they have sought to bring under their sway the tribal places of worship in Wyanad is, perhaps, typical. In general, the belief systems of the tribals are so heterogeneous and discrete that one would be hard put to call it a religion in the modern sense of the term. Rather they are practices and observances of groups of people who share a close and symbiotic relationship with nature; and these practices and beliefs tend to vary depending upon their mode of production and the nuanced nature of its interface with their habitat and environment. The deities they worship are natural forces like rivers or figures like the Mariamman, who is supposed to afford protection against dreaded epidemics like smallpox or yet again vegetation gods. These objects of cult worship, some of them having their origin in hoary antiquity have little relation to the gods of the Hindu pantheon. The places of worship also have scarcely any resemblance to the elaborate temple architecture of South India—indeed they are more

like shrines nestling under a tree in the *ooru* or by the river side, lacking any walled structure surrounding it and often even a roof. Moreover, the mode of worship was purely the internal matter of the tribe with the tribal chief doubling as the priest.

The modus operandi adopted by the Sangh Parivar activists to penetrate into this clan-bound preserve will become clear if we study the turn of events in a typical adivasi ooru situated in the banks of the river Kabani, Pakkom. The major deity of this 'ooru' is Pakkathappan, and his shrine is called Pakkom Kottai (literally the fort of Pakkom). Pakkathappan (the god of Pakkom) is purely a local, autochthonous, cult figure, who is believed to protect the people of Pakkom. It all started with the creation of a samithy for the renovation of Pakkom Kottai in which some non-tribals were also accommodated, on the basis of the fiction that it was once a temple that had been destroyed by Tippu Sultan. In course of time its name was changed to Kshetra Samrakshana Samithy, an all Kerala outfit floated in the 1960s by the Sangh Parivar. Soon a 'swami' to perform the puja in the shrine made his appearance at Pakkom. It is not accidental that before he took up this priestly vocation he had been working as the office secretary of the VHP in Calicut. It is reliably learnt that the VHP has a computerized database on educated, destitute youth belonging to the temple castes who could be deputed as priests in the adivasi shrines. They are on the pay roll of the VHP and can augment their income from the *dakhina* (cash offerings) offered by the worshippers. Again, once he was installed as the priest at Pakkom, there was a well-orchestrated whisper campaign about his alleged supernatural powers. Now an aura of divinity surrounds this figure, in the all too credulous eyes of the adivasis, and the *theertham* (holy water) he dispenses is believed to have healing powers, and to ward off misfortune it is only necessary to get him to perform a puja. He has, in effect, surreptitiously usurped the position of pre-eminence once enjoyed by the tribal chief and has some say in all matters concerning the tribe, both spiritual and mundane. What is remarkable is that figures like the swami of Pakkom have found their way to even obscure adivasi shrines of Wyanad. One is reminded of the campaign waged by the RSS in the early 1990s to win over the Valmiki community of Uttar Pradesh. and the efforts that are on to gain control of the jarams of Sufi saints in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Index

Advani, L. K., 38, 199, 280, 284, 285
Adivasis/tribals, 3-5, 51, 78, 82, 158, 279-81. *See also* Kerala, politcs of
Akali Dal, 153. *See also* Punjab, politics of
Ati-Shudras, 188, 191. *See also* Dalits; Untouchability
Ambedkar, B.R., 5, 13, 15, 60, 136, 145-46
  All India Depressed Classes Conference, 146
  and Bahujanwad, 189-90, 209
  and BSP, 219-20. *See also* BSP
  Brahminism, critique of, 172
  and Buddhism, 19n, 76, 89, 129, 156, 192, 215-16, 224. *See also* Dalits
  and Constitution, 209
  cooptation of, 6-7, 61, 75, 78, 143, 146, 156-57, 208, 214, 217, 271-72. *See also* Hindutva
  and followers' caste, 79, 210. *See also* Mahars
  and Hindu Code Bill, 192
  and Hindu social order, 148-49, 182-83
  and iconization of, 80, 105, 177, 182, 196, 213-14, 217, 220
  and *Manusmriti,* 127. *See also* *Manusmriti*
  on Muslims, 215, 216
  on reform, 157-58, 205
  and Samrasata Manch. *See* Samrasata Manch
  on Untouchability, 148-49
  on women, 12, 127-28
Ambedkar, Prakash, 217, 221
Andhra Pradesh, politics of, 15, 197, 253, 255. *See also* Hindutva
  and Babri Masjid ,260
  and Bangaru Laxman, 262-63
  and Brahmins, 255-56, 259
  and BSP, 262
  and Christians, 254, 256, 261-63
  and communists, 258-59, 263
  and Dalits, 253-57
    and Madigas, Malas, 15, 261-63
  and Hindutva, 253-54, 257-60, 263-64
  and Kammas, 260, 262
  anti-Mandal Commission,, 259
  and Muslim converts, 256, 257, 263
  and NTR, 260, 262
  and OBCs, 259
  and Gouda, Kapu, Velama, 257, 261
  and Reddys, 260-61
  and Shudras, 256, 262

TDP and BJP, 262
Telangana, Srikakulam movements, 258
Tripuraneni Rama Swamy, 257
Arya Samaj, 96, 149-50. *See also* Punjab, politics of
avarnas. *See* Dalits

Babri Masjid, 23, 60, 103, 138-39, 285, 302
Bahujan/Bahujanwad, 188-89, 193, 199-202. *See also* BSP; Hindutva
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), 187-88, 199
and BJP, 13-14, 137-38, 188, 191, 196-99, 201-3
and Dalit consciousness, 201, 284
as fourth largest, 189
and Kanshi Ram. *See* Ram, Kanshi
and Karnataka, 269. *See also* Karnataka, politics of
and land rights, 198
and Mayawati. *See* Mayawati
and OBCs. *See* Other Backward Classes
and poll alliances, 188, 201,
and post-Ambedkar, 189, 194, 200
and power, 173, 177-78, 189-90, 199-200
and Samajwadi Party, 193
and 'Taj corridor', 187, 189, 200, 202
Bajrang Dal. *See* Hindutva
BAMCEF, 284
Bharatiya Jan Sangh, 2, 35, 44, 51
Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), 51, 60, 102, 285, 292, 295. *See also* Hindutva; RSS
and Babri Masjid, 103-5, 138-40, 180, 193
as Brahmin-led, 153
and BSP alliances, 137, 195, 198
and cow slaughter, 10
and Dalit electoral support, 77-78, 213, 215
and electoral defeat 2004, 90, 109, 121, 187, 273, 296
and globalization. *See* globalization
and governments, 51, 202
and Kalyan Singh, 199, 201-3
and Mahila Morcha, 119
and Mandal Commission, 102-3
and manifesto, 139
Bharti, Uma, 20, 25, 28, 123, 276
Bhimshakti-Shivshakti. *See* Maharashtra, politics of; Shiv Sena
Brahminism, 5, 12, 141, 150, 255. *See also* Hindutva; *Manusmriti*
and Ambedkar, 127, 175
and daily life, 108, 225-26
Dalit critique of, 172. *See also* Dalits
And Dalits, 1-2, 5-6
and dwija, 64, 93, 255
and Hindutva, 4, 8, 225, 255
and history, 47, 171
and Jotirao Phule, 95
and OBCs, 6, 191
and the Other, 171-72, 180
and social order, 12, 105, 145, 158, 194, 195
Bremen, Jan, 288-89, 292
Buddhism, 13, 215, 226
Ambedkar's vision, 157, 183
Ashok Singhal on, 146
conversion, 76-77, 81, 211
as moral, not cultural

Buddhism *(cont.)*
alternative, 167, 226
caste system, 47, 76, 93, 150, 213. *See also* Savarkar, V.D.
anti-Mandal Commission, 6
caste Hindus, 3, 41, 48, 114, 154, 216, 227, 231, 242. *See also* OBCs; Shudras
changing nature of, 67, 168-70
and Census bias, 154
and Dalits, 4-6, 37-39, 46, 136-37, 142-44. *See also* Untouchability
and endogamy, 111-14
and Hindutva, 2, 28-31, 33, 60, 61, 64, 99, 104, 108, 10, 141, 145, 213
and superstructure, 183
Chakwara. *See* Rajasthan, politics of
Chattopadhyay, D.P., 254
Charmakars, 178, 210-13. *See also* Dalits
Christianity
and anti-conversion legislation, 129
Dalits, 8, 32, 42, 239, 254-55
Dalit Christian liberation movement, 165
and Hindutva, 47, 104, 144, 146, 163, 239
Congress Party, 53, 67-68, 95-96, 139, 165, 175-79, 187, 194, 201, 210-13, 282-83, 292. *See also* Maharashtra, politics of; Uttar Pradesh, politics of
Chuhras. *See* Punjab, politics of

Dalits, 3-4, 80, 83. *See also* BJP; BSP
Ambedkarite, 6, 7-8, 61-62, 76, 104, 203, 208
and atrocities, 16n, 17n, 35, 37-42, 66, 83, 86-87, 137-38, 179, 198-99, 295
communalism, 2-3, 12, 48, 61, 82-83, 89, 105, 144, 281. *See also* Andhra Pradesh, politics of; Gujarat, politics of
and conflicts, 85-86
and critique of caste system, 76
and Congress Party, 8, 14, 209, 211-12
and cooptation, 144-45, 172
and conversion, 76-78, 156. *See also* Buddhism
and globalization, 65-68, 88, 163, 167-68. *See also* globalization
and Hinduism, 3-5, 77, 255
and jobs, urban, 87-88, 166-67
as masses, 80-81, 82-84, 89-91, 154, 180, 217, 281
and media, impact of, 119-20
as middle class, 80, 84, 142, 166, 182
and minorities, 8. *See also* Christians; Muslims
and movements, 1, 81, 137, 155, 157, 172-75, 177, 180, 196, 200-1, 217, 220
and politics of, 13-14, 69, 75-77, 82-83, 138, 172-74, 176-82, 200, 217-218, 220
and Poona Pact, 155
and post-Ambedkar, 81, 158, 194, 200-4
and Tamil Nadu. *See* Tamil Nadu, politics of
and village system, 3-4, 85-87, 174
women, 108-10, 174. *See also* Dalit women
Dalit NGOs, 79-80

Dalit Panthers, 14, 79, 82, 176, 181, 201, 206-7, 217, 281
Dalit women, 236n
and attire, 115-16
and anti-conversion law, 129
as feminist, 121
and globalization. *See* globalization
and politics, 182
and Sangh Parivar, 110-11, 132-33
sexuality, control of, 114, 131
as voiceless, 108
Deoras, M.D./Balasaheb, 81, 192. *See also* Hindutva; RSS
Dravidian movement, 14, 104, 129, 130, 147. *See also* Tamil Nadu politics of
DS4, 284

the Emergency, 51, 210

Fascism/fascist, 1, 57, 236
vs. Ambedkar, 221
features of, 140-42, 275, 296, 302
as Hindu, 138-42
Hindutva, 12, 16, 86, 109, 290
and neoliberalism, 56
and Marxist view of, 58
and parliamentary process, 296
Friedman, Milton, 53

Gandhi, Indira, 210, 283, 295
Gandhi, M.K./Mahatma, 61, 76, 100, 101, 141, 155, 175, 257, 282, 284
Gandhi, Rajiv, 283-84
Golwalkar, M.S., 2, 8, 19, 32-33, 34, 50-52, 59-60, 110, 115, 145, 213
globalization, 12, 52-53, 67, 131, 168, 182, 289-90, 295
Gujarat, politics of
and BJP, 278-79, 283-85, 288, 293
and Brahmin-Bania-Patidar axis, 283, 285
and Dalits, 88-89, 276-77, 279, 284-86, 293-94
economy of, 282, 286-91
Fascism, 2775-76, *See also* Fascism
and Godhra, 275, 277-79
Hindutva/Sangh Parivar, 276-77,291, 292, 294
KHAM, 283
Keshavram, Kushiram Shashtri, 277
Majoor Mahajan Sangh, 282, 292
and Narendra Modi. *See* Modi, Narendra
and Muslims, 48, 83, 105, 136, 163, 285, 286, 289, 291, 293, 294
and Navanirman, 282-83
and OBCs, 282, 283
pogrom, 1, 3, 11, 12, 136, 275, 276
riots, 88, 101, 283, 286
tribals, 276, 279, 290-91, 293, 294
Gaekwad, Dadasaheb, 176

Hayek, Friedrich, 53
Hegde, Ramkrshna, 268
Hegdewar, K.B., 28-30, 49, 146
Hindu Mahasabha, 98, 99, 104, 150-52, 164-65
Hindu Munnani, 224
Hinduism, 1, 47, 254
and caste, 41, 47-48, 67, 150-51
and Dalits, 224, 229-30
and individualism, 63-64
and *Manusmriti,* 10, 24

Hinduism *(cont.)*
and neoliberalism, 62, 64-65
and social order, 6, 47, 141-42, 145, 158, 230
and Hindu Rashtra, 171, 173, 230, 276, 280. *See also* Savarkar, V.D.
Hindutva, 7, 10, 97, 104, 187, 255. *See also* Golwalkar, M.S.; Hedgewar, K.B.
alliance with Dalits, 6-9, 11, 41, 78-83, 136, 167, 173-74, 190, 193, 200-2, 221. *See also* BSP
and Ambedkar, 189, 215, 280. *See also* Ambedkar, B. R.
and *Anandamath,* 279-80
and Andhra Pradesh. *See* Andhra Pradesh, politics of
and British Rule, 95-98
and caste, 2, 60, 148. *See also* Brahminism; caste system; Savarkar, V.D.
and cows, 42n, 59. *See also* Punjab, politics of
anti-Dalit, 10, 41, 69, 77. *See also* Dalits
anti-Mandal Commission, 6
anti-Muslim, 2, 8, 41, 92-95, 111, 216, 294. *See also* Gujarat, politics of
brahminic values, 2, 11, 185, 216, 229
and culture, 11-12, 121-22, 147, 167, 171, 182
definitions of, 1-2, 46, 58, 75, 92, 139
as fascist. *See* Fascism/fascist
and globalization, 19, 68-69
and media, 114-20, 280, 281
middle classes and, 89-91
and neoliberalism, 49, 57, 292-93
and the Other, 140, 142, 171, 180, 294
and RSS. *See* RSS
and Tilak, Lokmanya, 58-59, 280
and Untouchability, 8, 61, 230, 276

Independent Labour Party, 79, 175-76, 182. *See also* Ambedkar, B. R.; Dalits
Ilaiah, Kancha, 95, 157, 291
Islam, 24-25, 32-33. *See also* Muslims

Jaffrelot, C., 147, 178, 184, 202n. *See also* BSP
Jan Sangh. *See* Bharatiya Jan Sangh
Jayalalithaa, 39-40, 147. *See also* Tamil Nadu, politics of
Jhajjar atrocity, 137, 138

Karnataka, politics of, 15
and Ambedkarism, 265, 267, 273-74
anti-Muslim, 266, 269-70, 272
and BJP, 269, 273
and BSP, 269, 273
and communists, 267
and Congress, 265-67
and Dalit masses, 268-74
and Dalit middle class, 266-68, 272
and Dalit Sangharsha Samithi, 267, 268
and globalization, 269-70, 272
and Harijan consciousness, 265-67
Honnapura, Indhudhara, 269
and Janata Party/Dal, 267-68, 273
and Kannada nationalism, 266
and Lohiaite socialism, 267

and Muslims, 266
and OBCs, 266, 267
and Okkaligas, 266
and RSS/Sangh Parivar, 262, 269-73, 274
and Shamsundar, 265
Kamath, M.V., 148, 191
Kanchi Shankaracharya, 130-31,224, 231, 233
Kanungo, Pralay, 146-47
Kasbe, Raosaheb, 8, 218-19, 220. *See also* Shiv Sena
Kerala, and Hindutva, 16, 300-3.
Kishor Giriraj, 10, 36

Left/leftist parties. *See also* Maharashtra, politics of
and caste, 181-82, 183, 260
and Dalits, 14, 178, 179-81, 190, 204, 258
as secular force, 263
Lohia, Ram Manohar, 151, 267

Madigas/Malas. *See* Andhra Pradesh, politics of
Madhya Pradesh, 20
Maharashtra, politics of. *See also* Dalits; Shiv Sena
Ambedkar, B. R., on reform, 153-54, 209
And Ambedkar, Prakash, 217-18, 221
and Athavale faction, 217-18, 221
Brahmin rebellions, 58, 59. *See also* Fascism/fascist
C. Jaffrelot on, 98, 99
and casteist reaction, 100, 164, 181
and Congress Party, 208, 209, 211-13, 218
and Dalit Panthers, 209-10
and Dalits, 78, 79, 144-45, 165, 208-9, 210
Deshbhakti, 14, 221
and intra-caste politics, 210-11. *See also* Charmakar; Mahar
and the Left, 208-10
Marathwada University, 207
and Republican Party of India (RPI), 209-13
and RSS, 136
Mahars, 210-11
Manusmriti, 10, 12, 20-28, 34, 67, 93, 104, 127, 191-92
Marathas, 219
Matangs, 178, 207-9
Mayawati, 148, 177-78, 187-88, 197-98, 202, 219, 220, 269. *See also* BSP; Dalits
Modi, Narendra, 199, 275, 276, 280, 286, 295
Mookerjee, Shyama Prasad, 43-44n, 147-48
Moonje, B. S., 49, 59, 98
Muslim League, 97
Muslims, 2, 55-56. *See also* Gujarat, politics of; Hindutva
and Andhra Pradesh, 256
casteism of, 21-22, 24-25, 232
conversions, 33, 93, 94, 98
and Dalits, 8, 41-42, 48, 82, 85-87, 104, 164, 177, 194, 232
and Hindutva, 47, 62, 68, 78, 98, 144, 146
and homo economicus, 52-53
anti-Mandal Commission riots, 6, 283
neoliberalism, 54, 295
as the Other, 12, 99-100, 111-12, 119, 239. See also Savarkar, V.D.
Raosaheb Kasbe, 218, 219
and Samrasata Manch, 215

Muslims *(cont.)*
and separate electorates, 99
and Shiv Sena, 218, 220
and Thevars, 128-29
and rural Dalits, 87

Nandy, Ashish, 101-2
Narayan, Jayaprakash, 281
Nazis, 105, 111, 110. *See also* Hindutva
neoliberalism, 11, 49, 52-53. *See also* globalization
Bourdieu on, 49, 66-68
and Dalits, 65-69
Diaspora and, 55-56
Fascism and, 56-57
Hinduism and, 62-64
Hindutva and, 49, 66-68
as social order, 54-55

Omvedt, Gail, 188, 205n
Other Backward Classes (OBCs). *See also* Hindutva
and Dravidian movement, 227
and growth of, 282
and Hindutva forces, 164-66
and Kansi Ram, 194
as politicians, 148, 159n, 197
as rural dominant, 85-86, 128-29
as savarnas, 6
and Shiv Sena, 218-19
and worship, 255

Panjab, politics of
and Arya Samaj, 242-43
and Christians, 239-42
and Dalit Sikhs, 238
and Chamars, 244-45, 249
and Chuhras, 241, 245, 249, 250n
and Gurdwara politics, 238, 246-50
and Hindu minority, 239, 245
Jats *vs* Dalits, 14-15, 238, 246, 247, 249
Jhajjar atrocity, 137
Mazhabis, 241-42
Rahitas, 239-40
Rangretas, 241
Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committe, 238, 239
Sikhism, 245, 247-48, 249
Talhan, 238, 245-50
Pantawane, Gangadhar, 216
Patil, Sharad, 164
Periyar, E.V. Ramasamy, 12, 61, 127-28, 228
Phule, Jotirao, 12, 61, 95-96, 101, 127-28, 136, 142, 164, 177, 188, 213

Rajasthan, politics of, 24, 40-41, 138, 152-53, 197
Rai, Lajpat, Lala, 242. *See also* Punjab, politics of
Ram, Kanshi, 148, 190-91, 193-96, 202, 205n, 206n, 219, 262
Rashtriyasevika Samiti, 109-10, 128
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), 2, 133n. *See also* Golwalkar, M.S.; Hindutva
anti-minorities, 104
brahminical emphasis, 25-27
caste discourse of, 28-30, 32-33, 60, 104, 113, 213
and Chennai, 147. *See also* Tamil Nadu, politics of
and Dalits, vs OBCs, 165
and Hindutva, 171
and Karnataka, 16-17. *See also* Karnataka, politics of
and Kerala, 303. *See also* Kerala,

politics of
and *Manusmriti*, 24. *See also* *Manusmriti*
the *Organiser,* 10, 24, 28, 34, 191
Samajik Samrasata Manch, 214-17, 280. *See also* Samajik Samrasata Manch
and Sangh Parivar, 60
and state, 50, 57
on women, 121-25
Republican Party of India (RIP), 79, 81, 178, 209, 232
Rithambara, Sadhvi, 124
Ruben, Walter, 254

Samajik Samrasata Manch, 7, 61, 75, 103, 214, 280. *See also* Dalits
Samajwadi Party (SP), 187, 191, 193, 203.
Sangh Parivar, 1, 47, 62-63, 82-82, 159n. *See also* RSS
and Andhra Pradesh, 259-60. *See also* Andhra Pradesh, politics of
and anti-reservation, 101-2
and Bhimshakti-Shivshakti, 128
and Brahmin domination, 2, 151-52
and Dalits, 92, 101-2, 114-15, 276
and endogamy, 111-14, 131
and media, 117-21
on Muslims, 2, 111-12
on patriarchy, 125, 126
on rape, 125, 126
on Uniform Civil Code, 116-17
on St Valentine's Day, 121-23
Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams, 3
on women, 108-9, 111-14, 117, 123-25, 128
Sanskritization, 61, 102-4, 285-86, 301
Saraswati, Dayanand, 96, 149-50
Satya Murthy, K.G., 258
Savarkar, V.D., 10, 27, 30
anti-Muslim, 216
and casteism, 31-32, 67
Dalits *vs.* minorities, 144
and Fascism, 59, 62
and Hindu Rashtra, 46-47, 171, 173, 280
on Hindus, 143, 280
and the Other, 99-100
SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 198-99
Scheduled Castes, 34, 76, 115, 145, 148, 245, 261, 282. *See also* Dalits
Shahu Maharaj, 177
Shinde, Vitthal Ramji, 188
Shinde, Sushil Kumar, 213
Shiv Sena. *See also* Maharashtra, politics of
Bal Thackeray, 61, 220
Bhimshakti-Shivshakti, 7, 13, 62, 75, 83, 136, 173, 179-80, 220-21, 238
and Dalits, 178, 210, 221
and electoral politics, 212-13
Fire and *Water,* 114
and members, 219
and OBCs, 219. *See also* Other Backward Classes
and Raosaheb Kasbe on, 218-19
and Sushil Kumar Shinde, 213
Shourie, Arun, 52, 214
Shudras, 24-25, 64, 93, 188, 191-92, 197, 215-16, 276. *See also* Brahminism; *Manusmriti*
Sikhism, 153. *See also* Punjab, politics of
Singhal, Ashok, 146, 160n, 275

Srinivas, M. N., 285-86
Sudarshan, K.C., 239, 275, 300
Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, 52

Tamil Nadu, politics of, 14, 38-39
  animal sacrifice, 130
  anti-conversion legislation, 129-31, 233, 234-35
  atrocities, 228-29
  Dalits and Hindu status, 224, 230-32, 235
  Dalit-Muslim unity conference, 235
  Dalit Panthers, 130-31, 225, 229
  Dravidian movement, 14, 129, 130, 147, 226-28, 233
  and elections 2004, 130, 233-34, 235
  and Hindutva, 226, 229-33
  Jayalalithaa, 39-40, 147, 233-34
  M. Karunanidhi, 233
  non-Brahmins, 227, 228-230, 233
    Nadars, 234
    Thevars, 234
    Vanniyars, 61, 234, 237n
  Puthiya Tamizhagam, 225, 229, 231, 232
  Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai, 224, 228
  the state and, 234-36
  Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam, 232
  K. Veeramani, 233
Thackersay, Bal, 61, 220. *See also* Shiv Sena
Thapar, Romila, 48
Thirumaavalavan, 130-31, 229, 237n
Togadia, Pravin, 280
tribals. *See* Adivasis

Untouchability
  abolition of, 2, 61
  and Gangadhar Pantawane, 216
  and K.B. Hedgewar, 30
  and Hindu status, 76, 174, 180, 229-30, 232
  and Hindutva, 138, 231, 279
  and Kanchi Shankaracharya, 231
  and Muslims, 291
  and Punjab, 242. *See also* Punjab, politics of
  and Rajasthan, 153. See also Rajasthan, politics of
  and rural India, 83
  and Tamil nationalism, 233. *See also* Tamil Nadu, politics of

Upadhyaya, Deendayal, 2, 34-35, 44n
Urs, Devraj, 267
Uttar Pradesh, 9, 13, 35, 200, 220. *See also* BSP
  and coalition politics, 173, 177, 190, 201
  and poll alliances, 194-95. 198
  and Samajwadi Party, 187, 195

Vaghela, Fakirbhai, 292
Vajpayee, A.B., 44n, 296n
Valera, P.K., 292
Vivekananda, Swami, 61, 94, 111
Vishwa Hindu Parishad, 41, 103, 128, 146, 197, 199
von Mises, Ludwig, 53

Yadav, Laloo Prasad, 148
Yadav, Mulayam Singh, 148, 188. *See also* Uttar Pradesh, politics of